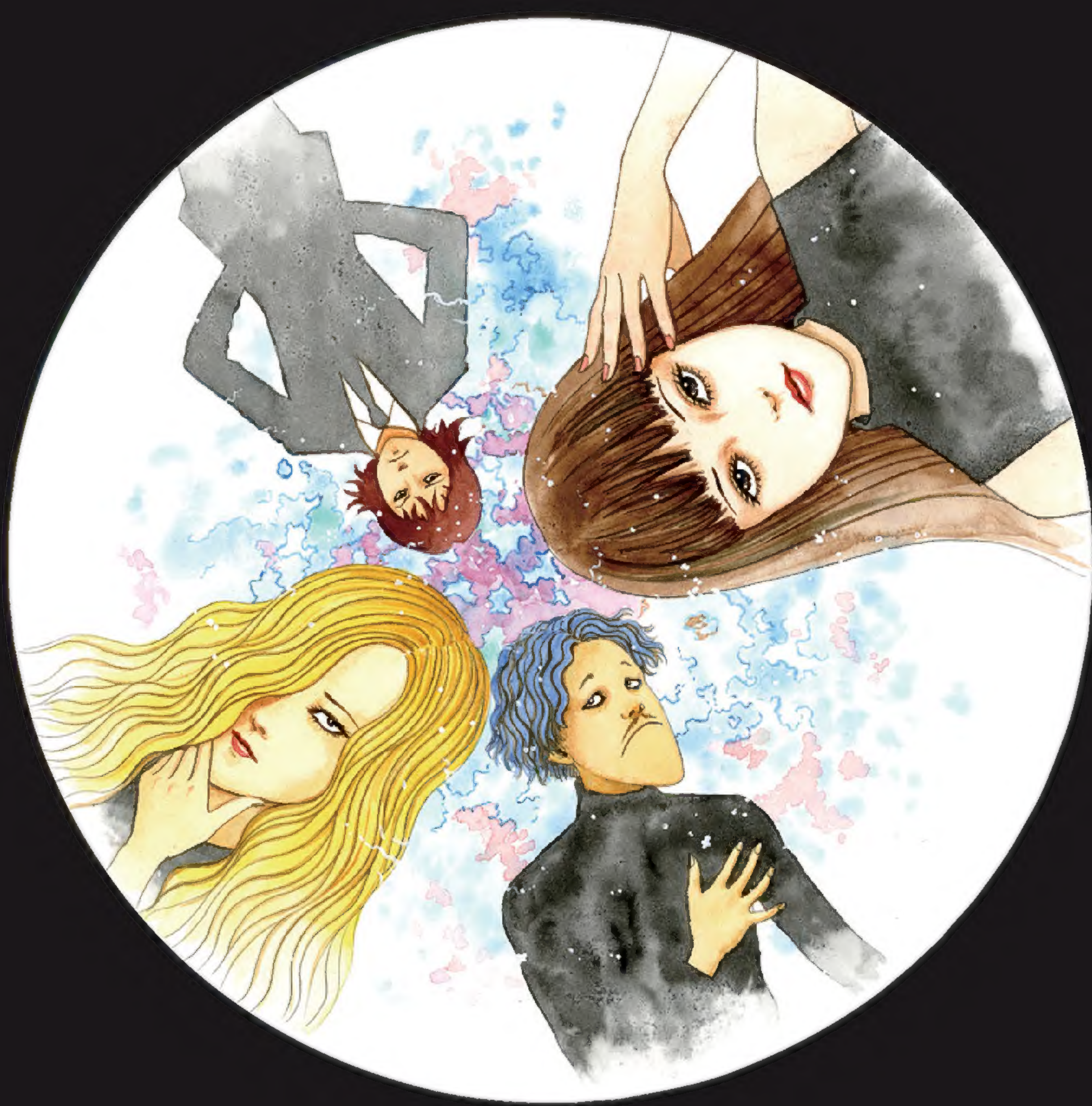
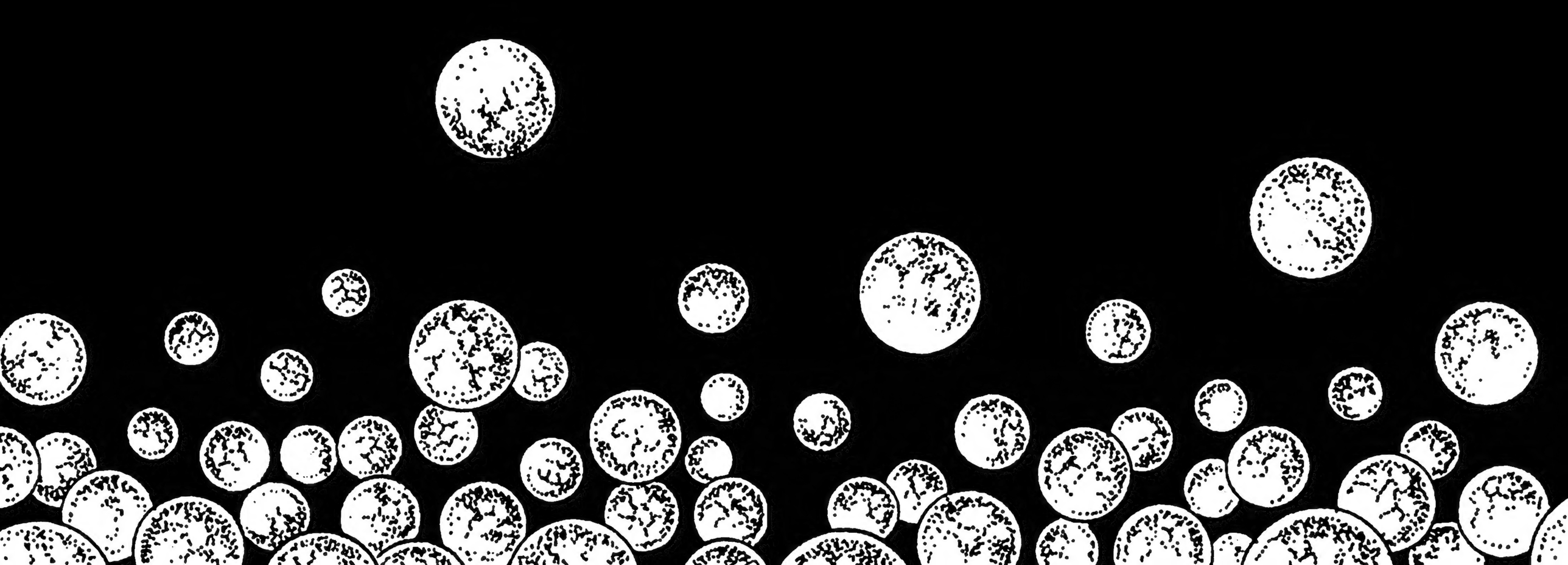


BLACK PARADOX

BLACK PARADOX

BY ㄱㄷㄴㄱ ITO



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Chapter 1

GROUP ｸﾞﾙｰﾌﾟ

I'M PII-TAN.

NICE TO MEET YOU.

I'LL GO FIRST. MY HANDLE'S TABURO.

WE'RE ALL MEETING FOR THE FIRST TIME? GOOD THING WE AGREED TO WEAR BLACK SO WE'D BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY EACH OTHER.

I'M MARUSO.

I GO BY BARACCHI.

ON OUR JOURNEY TO PARA-DISE.

OKAY. WE'RE ALL HERE. LET'S GET GOING.

VRRRRRR

VRRRRR

WE'RE SURE TO DIE.

RIGHT.

OR WE COULD GO PEACEFULLY WITH SLEEPING PILLS.

CAR EXHAUST WOULD BE GOOD. I BROUGHT A HOSE.

HOW?

SO...

HOW ABOUT WE EACH SAY OUR REASON FOR WANTING TO DIE?

WE MET ON THE SUICIDE SITE BLACK PARADOX, AND NOW WE'RE EACH OTHER'S FINAL COMPANIONS.

SO WHY DO YOU ALL WANT TO DO THIS?

OKAY.

...

I HAVE THIS FEELING THAT A SERIES OF DISASTERS LIES IN MY FUTURE, AND I CAN HARDLY BEAR IT.

A VAGUE SENSE OF ANXIETY ABOUT MY OWN FUTURE. THAT WAS THE MOTIVATION FOR THE WRITER RYUNOSUKE AKUTAGAWA'S SUICIDE.

IT'S JUST... I GUESS YOU COULD CALL IT A VAGUE ANXIETY.

I DON'T HAVE AN EXACT REASON.

HAVE YOU SEEN YOUR DOPPEL-GÄNGER, MARUSO?

SPEAKING OF RYUNOSUKE AKUTAGAWA, THEY SAY HE SAW HIS DOPPELGÄNGER RIGHT BEFORE HE DIED.

THAT'S SOME-THING.

WOW.

MY PRE-MONITIONS OFTEN COME TRUE.

...SEEING HIM A FEW MONTHS AGO.

I STARTED ...

NO, I HAVEN'T.

YOU MEAN THAT THING WHERE YOU SEE ANOTHER YOU?

I'VE SEEN MY DOPPEL-GÄNGER.

NO? I HAVE.

...WOULD STARE AT ME FROM AFAR, EYES FILLED WITH HATRED.

THIS MAN, MY EXACT DOUBLE ...

THIS IS THE RIGHT TIME FOR ME TO GO.

THIS WORLD IS BORING, ANYWAY.

SO I DECIDED TO KILL MYSELF. DO IT FIRST, BEFORE DEATH COMES FOR ME.

ONE THEORY HAS IT THAT IF YOU SEE YOUR DOPPEL-GÄNGER, YOU'RE GOING TO DIE SOON.

ONE DAY, WE DECIDED WE WOULD BUILD THE WORLD'S MOST ADVANCED HUMANOID. LEADING US WAS AN AUTHORITY IN THE FIELD, PROFESSOR TSUCHIYA.

I SPECIAL-IZED IN ROBOTICS AT MY UNIVER-SITY.

YOU SAW YOUR DOPPEL-GÄNGER, TOO, PII-TAN?

WHAT ?

THAT'S KIND OF LIKE WHY I'M DOING IT.

WEIRD...

BUT THE BIT ABOUT ANOTHER ME IS LIKE YOUR STORY.

OH, NO. IT'S NOT A DOPPEL-GÄNGER FOR ME.

IT PERFORMED MAGNIFICENTLY, TRULY THE ULTIMATE HUMANOID.

IN UTMOST SECRECY, WE TESTED ITS FUNCTIONALITY BEFORE MAKING AN ANNOUNCEMENT.

VWEEN VWEEN

KSHK KSHK

...RESEMBLED ME TO A FRIGHTENING DEGREE.

THE COMPLETED ROBOT ...

WE NEEDED A MODEL FOR THE ROBOT.

AND A MAJORITY VOTE CHOSE ME.

I SHOULD HAVE BEEN PROUD TO BE THE MODEL FOR THIS HISTORY-MAKING ROBOT. BUT FOR SOME REASON, ITS VERY EXISTENCE MADE ME FEEL LIKE MY BACK WAS UP AGAINST THE WALL.

BUT MY OWN FEELINGS WERE COMPLICATED.

EVERYONE IN THE LAB REJOICED.

SO I WANT TO DISAPPEAR FROM THIS WORLD BEFORE THAT.

THEY'LL MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE MEDIA SOON.

ON TOP OF THAT, EVERYONE IN THE LAB SAW THE ROBOT AS MORE *ME* THAN I WAS. THE REAL ME WAS JUST IN THE WAY.

I CAME TO BELIEVE THAT THIS MECHANICAL TWIN WAS SUPERIOR TO ME IN ALL WAYS.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MIRROR ?

BY THE *ME* ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MIRROR.

MY DEATH WAS ALSO PRONOUNCED BY ANOTHER ME, IN A CERTAIN SENSE.

MY STORY IS SIMILAR TO BOTH OF YOURS.

ME TOO...

...THE ME IN THE MIRROR IS SAYING, "DIE. DIE."

I JUST KNOW...

YES. EVERY TIME I SEE MY FACE IN THE MIRROR, I LOSE THE DESIRE TO LIVE.

I'LL SHOW YOU THE FACE THAT MAKES ME NOT WANT TO LIVE.

THIS IS THE END, SO...

ACTU-ALLY...

...“ANOTHER ME,” I GUESS.

HEH HEH HEH! SO THE THEME OF OUR SUICIDE IS...

...THIS IS THE *RIGHT* HALF OF MY FACE.

AS YOU CAN SEE...

WOULDN’T YOU WANT TO DIE IF YOU LOOKED LIKE THIS?

VRRR

VRRRRR

VRRRRRR

VRRRRRR

TH-THAT WAS...

VROOOO

RIDICU-LOUS! HA HA HA!

WHAT? ARE YOU SAYING THE MIRROR ME GOT OUT OF THE MIRROR?

AND YOUR FACE... IT WAS OPPOSITE. I MEAN, YOUR HAIR WAS COVERING THIS SIDE.

BUT I'M SURE OF IT. I SAW BARACCHI ESPECIALLY CLEARLY!

I GUESS ...

I...

BUT IT'S ACTUALLY THE LEFT. SO WHY...?

AND NOW THAT I'M THINKING ABOUT IT, SHE SAID THE RIGHT SIDE OF HER FACE WAS UGLY.

WHAT ON EARTH ...

BARAC-CHI'S NOT REFLECTED IN THE MIRROR.

VRRR

KACHAK

SLAM

LET'S SET UP THE HOSE FOR THE EXHAUST.

OKAY.

IT IS VERY QUIET.

THE PERFECT SPOT TO DIE.

PII-TAN.

DON'T YOU THINK HE'S... WEIRD?

HUH?

WHAT?

HEY, MARUSO ?

C'MERE A SEC.

HE'S... NOT HUMAN. THAT'S THE ROBOT. IT'S NOT THE REAL PII-TAN. BUT WHY WOULD THE ROBOT COME?

ZMMMMZ

ZMMZ

ZMMZ

WHAT ?!

HE... EVERY TIME HE MOVES, THERE'S THE SOUND OF MOTORS!

EVER SINCE WE GOT INTO THE CAR, HE'S SEEMED OFF TO ME. BUT I UNDERSTAND WHY NOW THAT WE'RE IN THIS QUIET PLACE.

WHAT?! FOR REAL?

HER REFLEC- TION WASN'T IN THE MIRROR.

...I THINK SOME- THING'S OFF WITH BARACCHI, TOO.

W-WHAT? I-IT CAN'T BE. BUT...

AH!

HERE. TAKE A LOOK.

POK

MM-HMM.

HEY, MARUSO? I THINK WE SHOULD JUST GET OUT OF HERE. QUIETLY.

WHATEVER'S GOING ON, IT'LL JUST BE YOU AND ME ACTUALLY DYING IN THAT CAR.

SO SOMETHING'S UP WITH HER, TOO. THEY'RE NOT HUMAN.

RUN!

HUFF HUFF

AH!

ZOOOZ
ZOOOZ
ZOOOZ
ZOOOZ
TMP
TMP
TMP
WE DECIDED TO DIE TOGETHER!
VWEEN
VWEEN
VWEEN
WHY ARE YOU RUNNING AWAY?!
TAK
AH!
GO!!

KRS

SSH

GRAB

VWEEN

VWEEN

CRACK

FOOT

LUNGE

VWEEEEN

GAH!

BARAC-CHI...

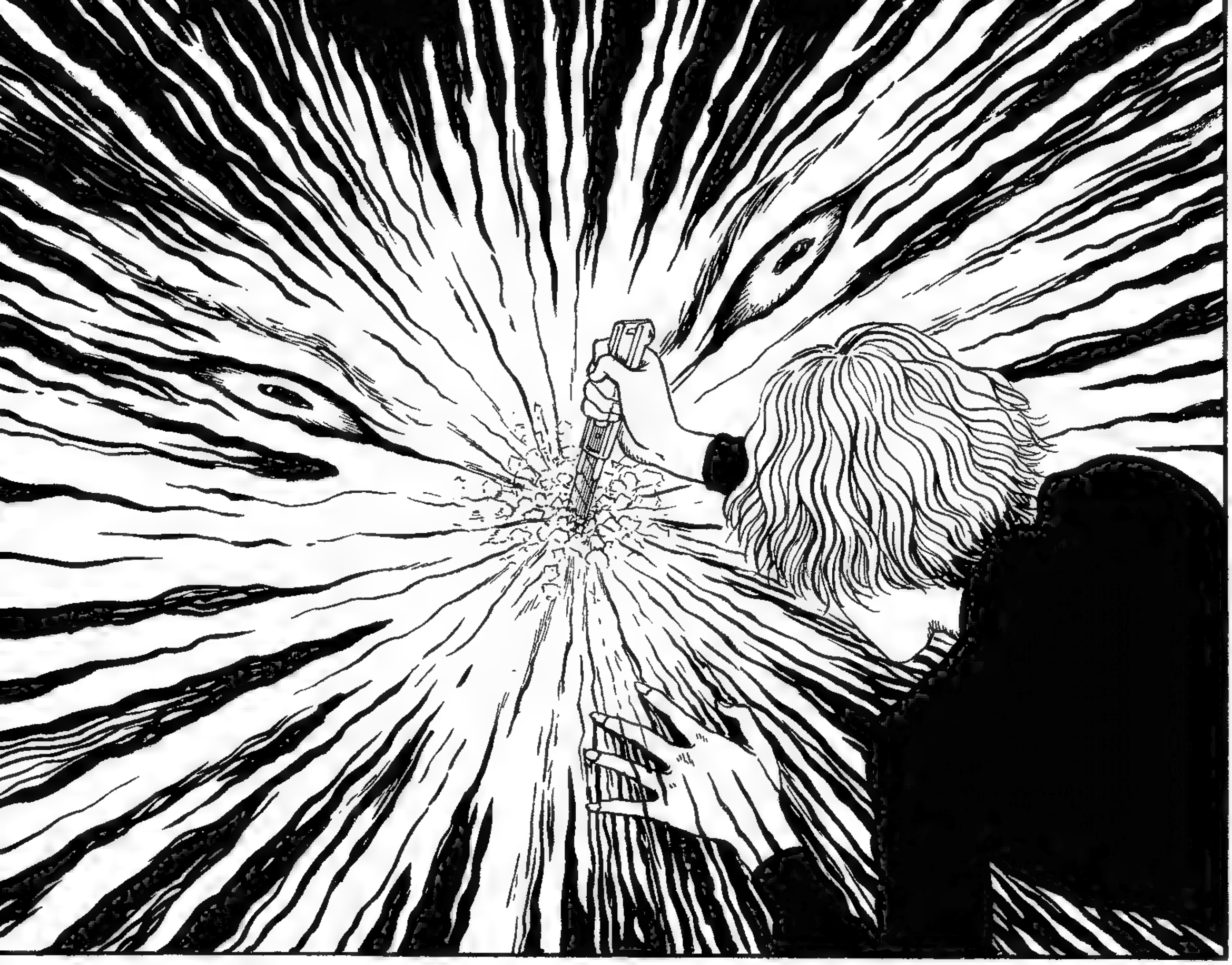
GET OFF ME!

THUD

19

STOP!

GRRP



TABURO ...

T—

SO...HE WASN'T HUMAN?

HE VANISHED. AN ILLUSION?

EEE!

WEEEEZ

KSH KSH KSH

HUFF HUFF

HUFF HUFF

FUK FUK FUK

ZWEEZ ZWEEZ ZWEEZ

FUK FUK FUK

ZWEEZ ZWEEZ ZWEEZ

KSH KSH KSH

KSH KSH

HELP!

AH!

PLEASE HELP!

BANG

HELP ME!

BANG

FWOOO

!

WHO IS IT?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT HERE, GETTING IN THE WAY OF OUR SUICIDE?

ZZZZZZZ

ZZZZZZZ

ZZZZZZZ

HM?!

HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE AT THE UNIVERSITY!

HIM... WHAT'S HE...

FRIEND

AH!

VWEN

VWEN

VWEN

AH! STOP!

KAUAN

VWEEEEN

I'M MARUSO.

AND WHO ARE YOU?

HSK HSK HSK HSK

WHAT IS GOING ON...?

W-WHAT?!

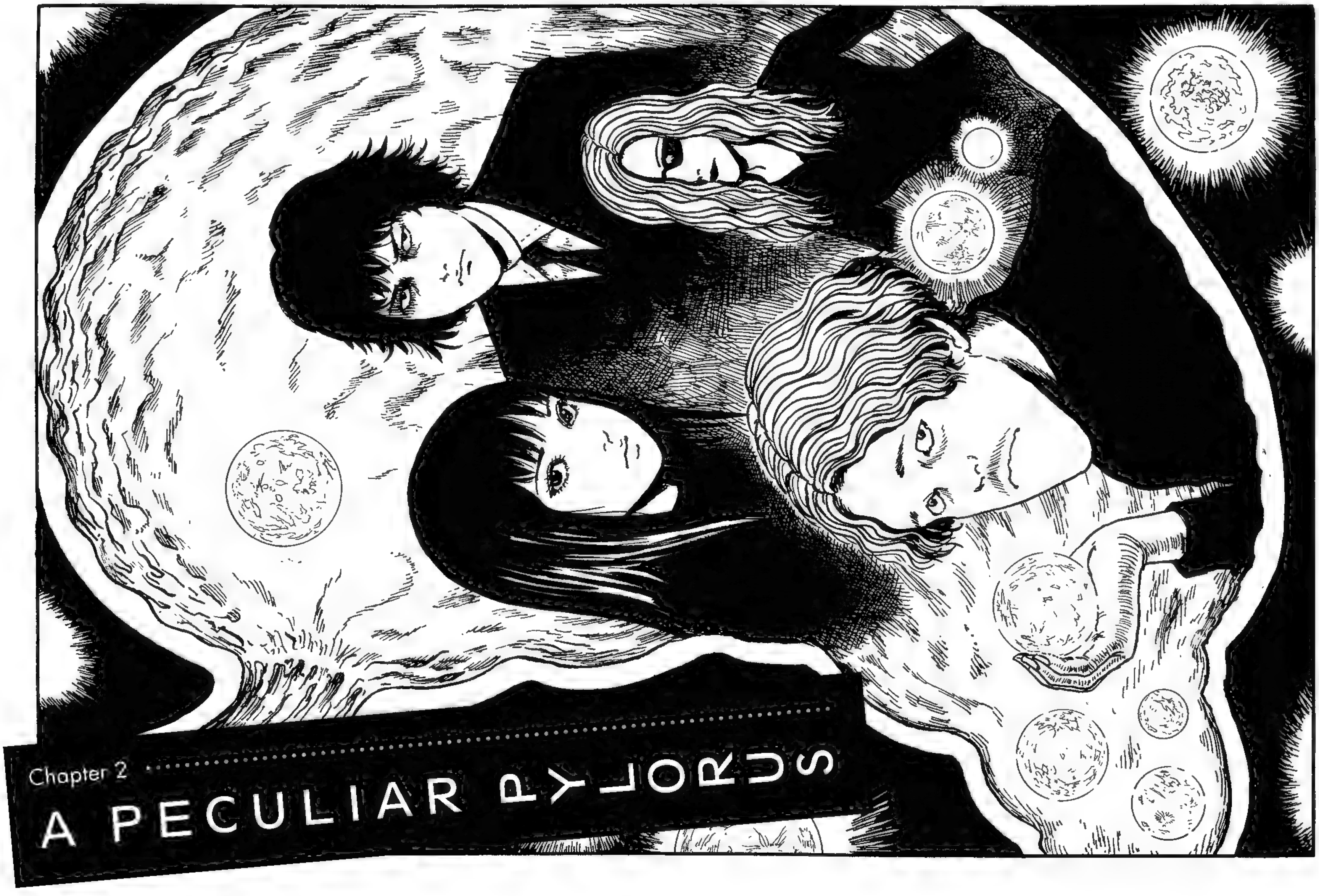
I... BEFORE I COULD FIND YOU, I MET UP WITH YOUR OTHER SELVES!

WE THOUGHT YOU WEREN'T COMING, SO WE LEFT.

MARUSO? YOU MEAN THE MARUSO WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO JOIN US?

THE FOURSOME DECIDED TO HOLD OFF ON SUICIDE.

THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE ROBOT ARE STILL UNKNOWN.



Chapter 2

A PECULIAR PLANET

...YOU'RE ALL REAL, RIGHT?

THIS TIME, THOUGH ...

THE LAST TIME WAS CUT SHORT AFTER THAT UNEXPECTED INCIDENT.

SO THIS IS OUR SECOND TRIP TO GO DIE, *HUH?*

FROM THE POSITION OF THE ABSCESS ON HER FACE, BARACCHI'S REAL.

...AND BARAC-CHI'S A MIRROR PERSON?

YOU THINK I'M A DOPPEL-GÄNGER, PII-TAN'S A HIGH-TECH ROBOT...

C'MON, MARUSO! YOU STILL DOUBT US?

SUCH A HARSH WORD FROM SUCH A PRETTY FACE.

"AB-SCESS" ...

I'M NO ILLUSION.

HMPH, I'M REAL. GO ON, TOUCH ME.

I'M NOT MAKING ANY MOTOR SOUNDS, AM I?

I'M DEFI-NITELY REAL.

AND BARACCHI COULD BE ONE OF AN INFINITE NUMBER OF BARACCHIS IN MIRRORS FACING EACH OTHER!

WELL, IF YOU'RE GOING TO TALK LIKE THAT, THEN MAYBE PII-TAN WAS IMPROVED SO HIS MOTORS ARE SILENT NOW.

TABURO ?

BUT MAYBE IT'S POSSIBLE TO TOUCH A DOPPEL-GÄNGER.

YES. AND ABOVE ALL ELSE, IS THIS EVEN THE REAL MARUSO SAYING ALL THIS?

I MEAN, IT'S STRANGE. YOU HAD SUCH A SCARY EXPERIENCE LAST TIME, AND YET HERE YOU ARE AGAIN.

I SUPPOSE. I DO SORT OF REGRET COMING.

LET'S TAKE A BUNCH OF SLEEPING PILLS AND GO THAT WAY.

HEY, PII-TAN! THE WHOLE EXHAUST THING IS TOO MUCH WORK AND WAY TOO SLOW.

WHAT JOY TO BE ABLE TO DIE QUIETLY IN A PLACE LIKE THIS.

A PLACE WITH AN OCEAN VIEW.

GULP

READY? WE TAKE THEM ALL ON TWO.

HERE'S TO THE END OF THIS TEDIOUS LIFE.

ONE. TWO.

SHAAAAA

PSHAAAAH

YOU CAN'T JUST PRETEND YOU'RE DEAD.

...PLANNING TO KEEP THIS UP?

HOW LONG ARE YOU...

HANG ON!

H—

I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE, SO I DIDN'T TAKE THE PILLS. I MEAN, ME DYING HERE ALONE, THE ONLY REAL PERSON, NO WAY.

I *KNEW* IT. YOU *ARE* THE FAKES!

...

KSH

YOU GOT ME DOUBT-ING EVERY-THING, TOO.

THE TRUTH IS, I DIDN'T TAKE THEM EITHER. SEE? RIGHT HERE.

YOUR ANXIETY'S CATCHING, IT SEEMS, MARUSO.

ME TOO.

OF COURSE HE'S DEAD. PII-TAN WAS REAL.

HE'S DEAD. PII-TAN'S THE ONLY ONE WHO TOOK THE PILLS.

...

UNGAAH!

ME, TOO.

BUT I'M FOLLOW-ING AFTER PII-TAN.

MARUSO, YOU'RE FREE TO DOUBT US. YOU DO WHAT YOU WANT.

NGH NGH NGH

UNNNNNH

BUT HE WAS DEFINITELY DEAD!

PII-TAN CAME BACK TO LIFE!

...

UNH!

GK

GK

GRK

THMP

WHIP

WHEEZE ...

WHEEZE ...

PII-TAN! YOU'RE ALIVE?!

SHAAAA

HAAH ...

YOU OKAY?

HAAH ...

HUH?

IT WAS A DAZZLING WORLD.

FULL OF LIGHT.

WHAT?

YOU VOMITED THAT UP.

WHY IS IT HERE ?!

W—

WHY IS IT HERE ...

THIS STONE ...

WHY WOULD THIS COME OUT OF HIS STOMACH?

YOU WASHED IT, RIGHT?

I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT.

WHAT KIND OF STONE IS IT?

SHIT

IT'S SUCH A PRETTY STONE.

MAYBE HE SWALLOWED IT?

I WANT TO HAVE A FRIEND TAKE A LOOK AT IT.

HEY? CAN I HOLD ON TO THIS FOR A BIT?

A LITTLE. I ACTUALLY USED TO WORK IN JEWELRY.

YOU KNOW ABOUT GEM-STONES?

IT ALMOST LOOKS LIKE BLACK OPAL, BUT THE WAY IT SHINES IS TOTALLY DIFFERENT.

AND HE SAID HE SAW A DAZZLING WORLD.

OF COURSE NOT. BUT PII-TAN VOMITED THIS UP AFTER COMMITTING SUICIDE. HE WAS DEAD.

YOU WANT TO MAKE SOME MONEY OR SOME-THING?

WHAT'S THE POINT IN GETTING A STONE LOOKED AT WHEN YOU'RE PLANNING TO DIE?

M-MEANING?

WHAT?!

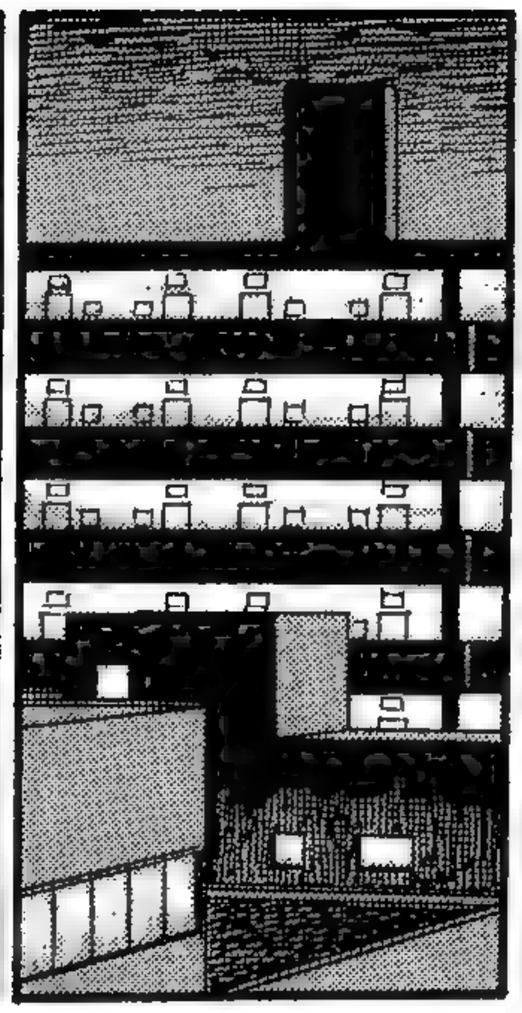
THIS STONE MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH *THAT* WORLD.

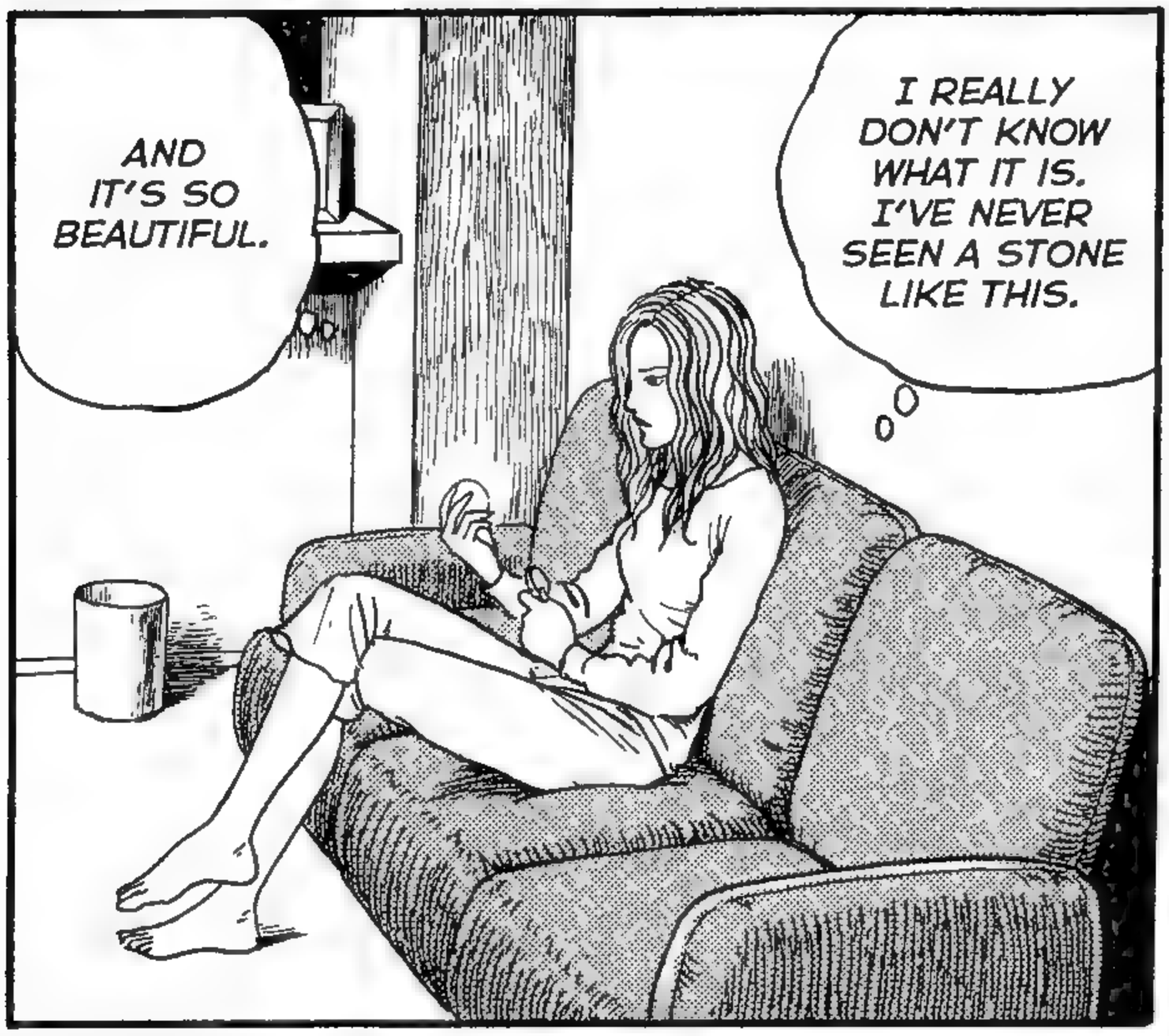
IN THE END, THE FOURSOME DECIDED TO WAIT FOR THE ANALYSIS OF THE STONE.

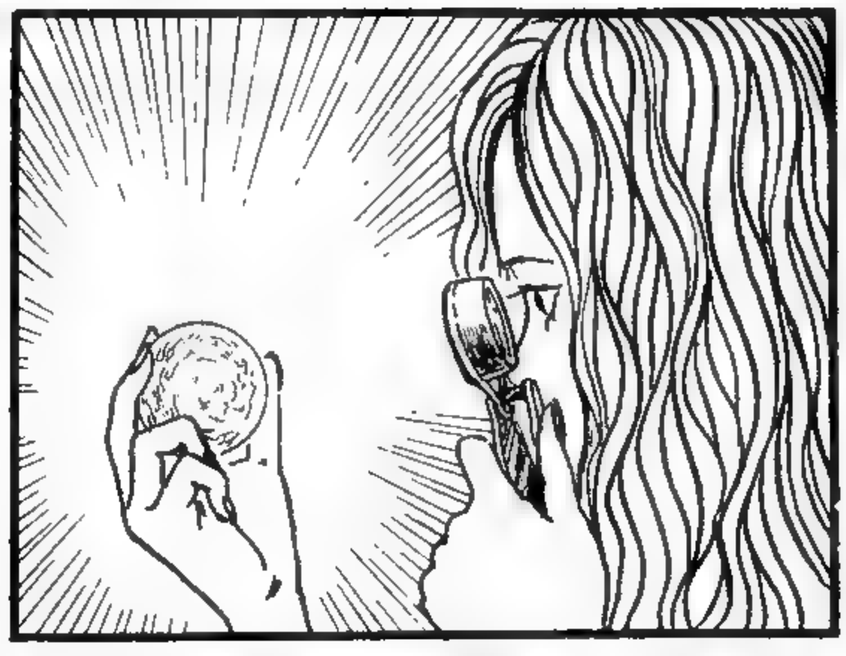
IT WAS A DAZZLING WORLD...

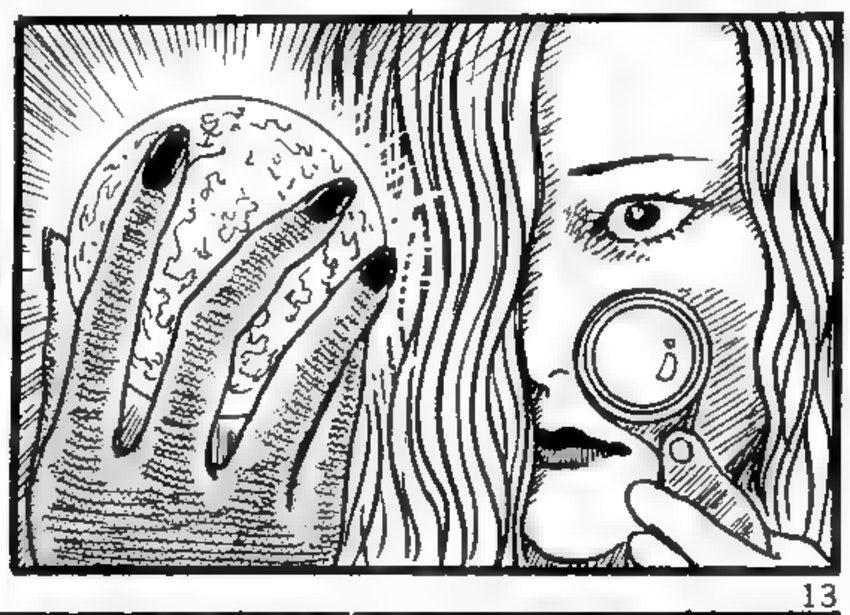
FULL OF LIGHT...

503
HIRATANI




AND IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL.
I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS. I'VE NEVER SEEN A STONE LIKE THIS.





...

TUNK

AH!

AH!

RECEPTION

CENTRAL GENERAL HOSPITAL

MR. HODO!

NEXT PATIENT, PLEASE.

TAKAYUKI KIMURA

INTERNAL MEDICINE

INFLUENZA

INSURANCE

DR TADASHI TANAKA

5 RECEP

AH!

YES.

LATELY, I'VE BEEN VOMITING UP STRANGE THINGS.

YES.

STRANGE THINGS?

I SEE.

YOU'RE HAVING STOMACH TROUBLE?

THANKS FOR SEEING ME, DOCTOR.

THIS WAY, PLEASE.

CER-TAINLY.

WELL, NURSE KIKUCHI, SHOW HIM TO THE EXAM ROOM.

BUT IT'S UNLIKELY THAT HE JUST HAPPENED TO COME TO MY HOSPITAL.

PII-TAN DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE REALIZED I'M MARUSO.

EXAM ROOM NO. 2

BUT IF HE'S HERE FOR TREATMENT, DOES THIS MEAN HE'S NO LONGER SUICIDAL?

WELL, WE DID MEET ON THE SUICIDE SITE BLACK PARADOX. WE DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER'S OCCUPATIONS, AND WE'VE NEVER SHARED OUR REAL NAMES.

UNGH!

UNH ...

IT MIGHT BE UNCOM-FORTABLE, BUT JUST BEAR WITH ME.

I'M GOING TO HAVE YOU SWALLOW THIS CAMERA.

AND THE PYLO-RUS...

YOUR STOM-ACH'S THE PICTURE OF HEALTH.

HM ?!

...

ESOPHA-GUS...

CARDIA ...

BOTTOM OF THE STOMACH... NO ABNOR-MALITIES.

DOCTOR ?

IS SOME-THING THE MATTER ?

AAAAAAAH!

TH-THE PYLORUS!

THE PYLORUS !!

DOCTOR!

AAAAAH!

SHH

AAAAAH!

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THE PYLORUS?

AAAAAAAAH!

THE PYLORUS !!

KLAK KLAK

THE PYLORUS !

THE RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS ARE BACK.

DON'T BE SURPRISED. IT SEEMS THIS STONE IS A NEW MINERAL.

TURNS OUT IT'S INCREDIBLY VALUABLE.

MY FRIEND WANTED TO KNOW WHERE I GOT IT.

SEEMS BEST IF WE KEEP QUIET ABOUT THE FACT THAT IT CAME FROM PII-TAN'S STOMACH.

YES. I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH IT WOULD BE WORTH ON THE MARKET.

SO THEN ...

...WE CAN MAYBE TURN THAT STONE INTO A PILE OF CASH?

THAT BELONGS TO PII-TAN.

HOLD ON A MINUTE.

AND THEN MY REASON FOR DYING'S...

IF I WERE RICH, I COULD FIX THIS "ABSCESS" ON MY FACE.

...WITH SOME EASY MONEY.

WELL, I GUESS WE CAN STILL DIE AFTER WE HAVE FUN...

I DON'T MIND SPLITTING THEM WITH YOU.

IF YOU WANT STONES... LOOK. I'VE VOMITED TONS SINCE.

...

SURE, DO IT.

I GUESS MY BODY... IS NOT OKAY.

THERE'S A PROBLEM WITH THIS PART IN MY STOMACH, THE PYLORUS.

23

GULP

GATE-KEEPER, *HUH?*

IT COMES FROM THE GREEK FOR "GATE-KEEPER."

IT CONNECTS THE STOMACH WITH THE DUODENUM.

THE PYLORUS? WHAT'S THAT?

WHAT ?

PYLORUS... YES! THAT'S IT. THAT'S WHERE THIS GEM CAME FROM!

KIND OF A CREEPY NAME FOR IT.

YOU KNOW SOME WEIRD THINGS.

AND THEN A GEM FROM THAT SIDE CAME THROUGH THE DOORWAY TO THIS SIDE. THIS VERY STONE...

AND THAT'S NOT ALL.

HE CAME BACK TO LIFE AFTER THAT, BUT SOMEHOW A DOORWAY WAS CREATED BETWEEN THIS WORLD AND THAT IN HIS STOMACH. RIGHT AROUND THE PYLORUS.

PII-TAN SAID HE SAW A DAZZLING WORLD WHEN HE DIED. THAT WAS PROBABLY THE AFTERLIFE. AND HE SAW COUNTLESS SHINING GEMS THERE.

THIS IS A SOUL.

THIS IS NO MERE STONE.

WHEN A PERSON DIES, THEIR SOUL BECOMES A BEAUTIFUL GEM LIKE THIS AND JOINS THE OTHERS IN THE VAST SPIRIT WORLD.

I SAW A SPIRITUAL FIGURE RISE UP FROM THIS STONE.

WHAT ?!

HNGAAAAAH...

URRP!

THMP
THMP

HRRRNGH
...
WHUD

WHAT'S GOING ON?!

NRRRGGH
...

H-HE'S VOMITING UP SO MANY!

TH-THIS IS BAD! THE STONES ARE POURING INTO HIS STOMACH ALL AT ONCE!

CHIK
CHIK
CHIK
CHIK
CHIK
CHIK

AH! PII-TAN'S STOMACH!

JUST GET TO THE CITY!

DAMMIT! ISN'T THERE A HOSPITAL AROUND HERE?!

RRRRR

...

NGGGGH...

PII-TAN, HANG ON!

HHHK HHHK HHHK HHHK HHHK HHHK

SKREEEEE

SKREE

EEAAUU

THUK

AAAH!

KACHAK

KLATTER

KLATTER

KLATTER

KLATTER

KLATTER

KLATTER

PII-TAN BURST OPEN!

W-WHAT JUST HAPPENED ?!

KLATTER KLATTER KLATTER KLATTER KLATTER KLATTER

?!

AH ?!

THE SOULS THAT CAME POURING OUT OF PII-TAN'S BODY...

...WERE PUT UP FOR SALE AS GEMSTONES OF A NEWLY DISCOVERED MINERAL.

Chapter 3

PARADONITE

HOME/TOP/SITE MAP

ABOUT

RAY BLOG

FROM HIS SEPT. 10, 2008, POST...

IT ALL STARTED WITH THE BLOG OF MEGA-FAMOUS ACTOR RAY TANIO.

ALE
YPE A
USHIMA
UITAR

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | NEXT »

New Release PHOTO BOOK

THE NOTE WITH IT SAID IT'S A NEWLY DISCOVERED MINERAL! \\\(°▽°)///

AN ANONYMOUS FAN SENT ME THIS INCREDIBLY BEAUTIFUL STONE!

Lovers! 2008.10.3

CALENDAR

THE MORE I LOOK AT IT, THE MORE I'M DRAWN TO IT! I FEEL LIKE IT'S GIVING ME POWER!

THEY SAID IT'LL BE AVAILABLE TO BUY SOON. BUT HOW AMAZING TO GET ONE AS A PRESENT FIRST!

BOTH FETCHED A SURPRISINGLY HIGH PRICE, WHICH GOT EVERYONE TALKING.

SOON, TWO OF THE GEMS WENT ON SALE UNDER THE NAME "PARADONITE."

TV KANTO

I DID.

SQUEE! SO COOL!

FIRST UP... RAY TANIO. YOU BROUGHT ALONG A CERTAIN SOMETHING, YES?

TITLED "MY TREASURE"!

NOW, ON TO OUR NEXT SEGMENT.

OOOH!

THIS IS ITS TV DEBUT.

AMAZING! I'VE NEVER SEEN A JEWEL LIKE THIS!

YES, IT MEANS "HEAVEN."

PARADONITE... ACCORDING TO ONE THEORY, IT MEANS "PARADISE."

WOW! JUST BEAUTI-FUL!

SHAKE SHAKE SHAKE SHAKE SHAKE SHAKE SHAKE SHAKE SHAKE SHAKE

USING A CELEBRITY TO GET PEOPLE INTERESTED LIKE THAT.

BARACCHI, YOU'RE SURPRISINGLY GOOD AT SALES.

HEH HEH...

YOU JUST GOT A LOT HOTTER SOMEHOW.

I WASN'T THINKING ABOUT SALES.

RAY TANIO'S JUST CUTE, SO I GAVE HIM ONE.

THEN YOU SELL JUST ONE, TO DRIVE UP THE PRICE. I LEARNED FROM YOUR EXAMPLE AND SOLD ONE MYSELF, ACTUALLY.

YOU GUYS.

...

HA HA HA HA!

HEE HEE HEE!

BUT IT'S TRUE, I DON'T FEEL MUCH LIKE DYING NOW.

RIGHT, WE WERE SUICIDE WANNABES.

THIS DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ABOUT SUICIDE.

WHY DID YOU ASK ME HERE?

AND THEN A FLOOD OF THOSE STONES CAME RUSHING OUT. SOULS, ACCORDING TO YOU, BARACCHI.

OUR FRIEND PII-TAN'S STOMACH BURST IN A CAR ON A MOUNTAIN ROAD THAT NIGHT.

HOW CAN YOU TWO BE SO CHEERFUL?

UNBELIEVABLE NERVE. BUT I GUESS YOU COULDN'T RESIST THE LURE OF THE STONES.

WHEN IT DISAPPEARED, YOU BOTH BEGAN TO COLLECT THE STONES WITH PII-TAN RIGHT THERE ON DEATH'S DOORSTEP.

AND THEN...

...WE SAW THAT TERRIFYING VISION.

OBVIOUSLY, I WANTED TO TAKE HIM TO A HOSPITAL.

WHERE DID YOU TAKE PII-TAN?

ANYWAY, MARUSO, YOU DROVE OFF AND LEFT US BEHIND THAT NIGHT.

PII-TAN'S STOMACH CONNECTS THE TWO WORLDS.

YES, THE STONES ARE SPIRITS. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, THEY'RE EXTREMELY BEAUTIFUL GEMS.

...AND LEFT PII-TAN THERE.

I STOPPED THE CAR OUTSIDE THE EMERGENCY ENTRANCE...

EMERGENCY

BUT BECAUSE I WAS PANICKING, I HAD TROUBLE FINDING ONE.

CENTRAL GENERAL HOSPITA

BEFORE I KNEW IT, I WAS IN FRONT OF THE HOSPITAL WHERE I WORK.

I DON'T KNOW. I HAVEN'T BEEN TO WORK SINCE THEN. AND I'M SCARED TO FIND OUT.

SO THEN WHAT HAPPENED TO PII-TAN?

YOU LEFT? YOU'RE SAYING YOU RAN OFF AND ABANDONED PII-TAN?!

IT'S JUST... HOW COULD I EXPLAIN IT TO THE DOCTORS?

AFTER ALL, PII-TAN'S STOMACH IS THE ONLY WAY TO GET THOSE STONES!

WELL, THANK HEAVENS FOR THAT!

BUT IT WASN'T ON THE NEWS. WHICH MEANS IT'S POSSIBLE THE DOCTORS SAVED HIS LIFE.

I WANT TO KNOW WHERE PII-TAN IS! TELL US WHAT HOSPITAL YOU WORK AT!

IT'S ABSOLUTELY NOT ENOUGH. WE'RE TALKING THE GLOBAL MARKET HERE!

YOU GRABBED THAT MANY OF THEM, AND YOU'RE STILL NOT SATISFIED?!

YOU HAVE TO JOIN US! WE'VE GOT A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD OF US!

STOP RIGHT THERE! YOU'D WALK AWAY FROM THE PARADONITE PROFITS?!

I'M LEAV-ING!

NO WAY! I'M NOT TELLING YOU ANYTHING PERSONAL!

GOOD-BYE.

NO THANKS.

...WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO PII-TAN.

...
BUT...
I DO ACTU-ALLY...

YOU DON'T... THANKS.

WE HAVE NO RECORD OF SUCH A PATIENT, NOT ON THE 29TH OR ANY OTHER DAY.

THE 29TH? PLEASE HOLD A MOMENT.

...IF A SERIOUSLY INJURED PATIENT CAME INTO EMERGENCY WITH A RUPTURED STOMACH ON THE NIGHT OF THE 29TH LAST MONTH? A YOUNG MAN IN BLACK.

COULD YOU TELL ME...

OH, HELLO! IS THIS CENTRAL GENERAL HOSPITAL ?

KSH KSH

KSH

I CALLED ALL THE HOSPITALS IN THE AREA AND ASKED ABOUT PII-TAN.

BUT I COULDN'T FIND HIM.

RSTLE RSTLE

BUT IF WE FIND EVEN ONE, THIS WON'T HAVE BEEN A WASTE OF TIME.

RSTLE

WE'RE NOT GOING TO FIND ANY MORE. WE'VE ALREADY LOOKED COUNTLESS TIMES.

RSTLE

MAYBE SHE DID.

...

I JUST KNOW SHE STOLE THEM.

AND THERE SHOULD STILL BE STONES IN THE CAR.

MAYBE THAT BRAT WAS LYING?

AH!

EEAAH!

WE'RE NEVER GOING TO FIND ANYTHING.

HEY, HOW ABOUT WE GET GOING?

RSTLE RSTLE

WHAT'S WRONG, BARAC-CHI?!

THAT MARUSO! SHE WAS LYING WHEN SHE SAID SHE TOOK HIM TO THE HOSPITAL!

I FOUND PII-TAN!

IT'S PII-TAN!

PII-TAN!

PII-TAN!

HM?

LEAVE HIM, BARAC-CHI. HE'S LONG DEAD.

IT'S THE ROBOT!

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

?

AH!

THIS ISN'T PII-TAN.

THIS ...

IT PROBABLY COLLAPSED WHEN ITS BATTERIES DIED.

BUT... WHAT IS THE ROBOT DOING HERE?

LOOK, HIS STOMACH'S NOT SPLIT OPEN.

YOU REMEMBER, DON'T YOU, WHEN IT SHOWED UP THAT TIME?

OH! YOU'RE RIGHT.

HIRATANI

DING DONG

IT'S USELESS TO US.

THE ROBOT...

COME IN. DON'T MIND THE MESS.

YAMA-NISHI.

TABURO, PUT THE ROBOT IN THE OTHER ROOM.

OH, RIGHT! I FORGOT MY FRIEND WAS COMING OVER!

THANKS TO YOU.

HIRATANI, PARADONITE IS ALL ANYONE IN THIS COUNTRY CAN TALK ABOUT.

IF WE GET THEIR CERTIFICATION, PARADONITE WILL OFFICIALLY BE A NEW MINERAL.

I SENT THE SAMPLE TO THE INTERNATIONAL MINERALOGICAL ASSOCIATION.

IT DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING IN COMMON WITH ANY MINERAL ON THIS PLANET.

I WAS SURPRISED MYSELF WHEN I EXAMINED THAT STONE.

SAME WITH WHERE WE GOT THEM.

HOW MANY DO WE HAVE? I'LL LEAVE THAT TO YOUR IMAGINATION.

EXACTLY HOW MANY DO YOU HAVE? AND WHERE DID YOU GET THEM? I HAVE TO KNOW!

BUT I WAS EVEN MORE SURPRISED TO DISCOVER THAT THE TWO OF YOU PUT ANOTHER PIECE ON THE MARKET.

I THINK IT'S TOO SOON IN ANOTHER WAY, TOO.

PARADONITE'S ON AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT LEVEL FROM YOUR AVERAGE NEW MINERAL. TO SELL IT, YOU NEED A STRATEGY.

THE TRUTH IS, THE MINERALOGICAL ASSOCIATION WASN'T HAPPY YOU SOLD ANY OF THEM BEFORE GETTING THEIR APPROVAL.

WHAT?

SOUNDS LIKE YOU STILL HAVE SOME THEN. YOU'D BEST HOLD OFF SELLING THEM FOR A BIT.

I'M CERTAIN ITS PRICE WOULD GO UP.

TRANSFORM IT INTO GORGEOUS ACCESSORIES, AND THAT STONE WILL SHINE EVEN MORE BRIGHTLY.

IF YOU SPLIT THEM, YOU'LL HAVE MORE TO SELL, AND THEY CAN BE USED IN JEWELRY.

FOR INSTANCE, THE SIZE. THE PARADONITE STONES I SAW WERE TOO LARGE.

HARDER THAN DIAMOND ?!

IN MY ESTIMA-TION, IT'S HARDER THAN DIAMOND !

THE ONLY PROBLEM IS THAT THE STONE IS EXTREMELY HARD. IT WON'T BE EASY TO BREAK APART.

OF COURSE IT IS, TABURO. EVERYONE KNOWS THE HARDEST SUBSTANCE ON EARTH IS DIAMOND.

HEY, BARACCHI? IS IT REALLY THAT INCREDIBLE THAT IT'S HARDER THAN DIAMOND?

I PICKED IT UP EARLIER.

OH MY! YOU WALK AROUND WITH A STONE? THAT'S NOT SAFE.

YOU GOT A HAMMER?

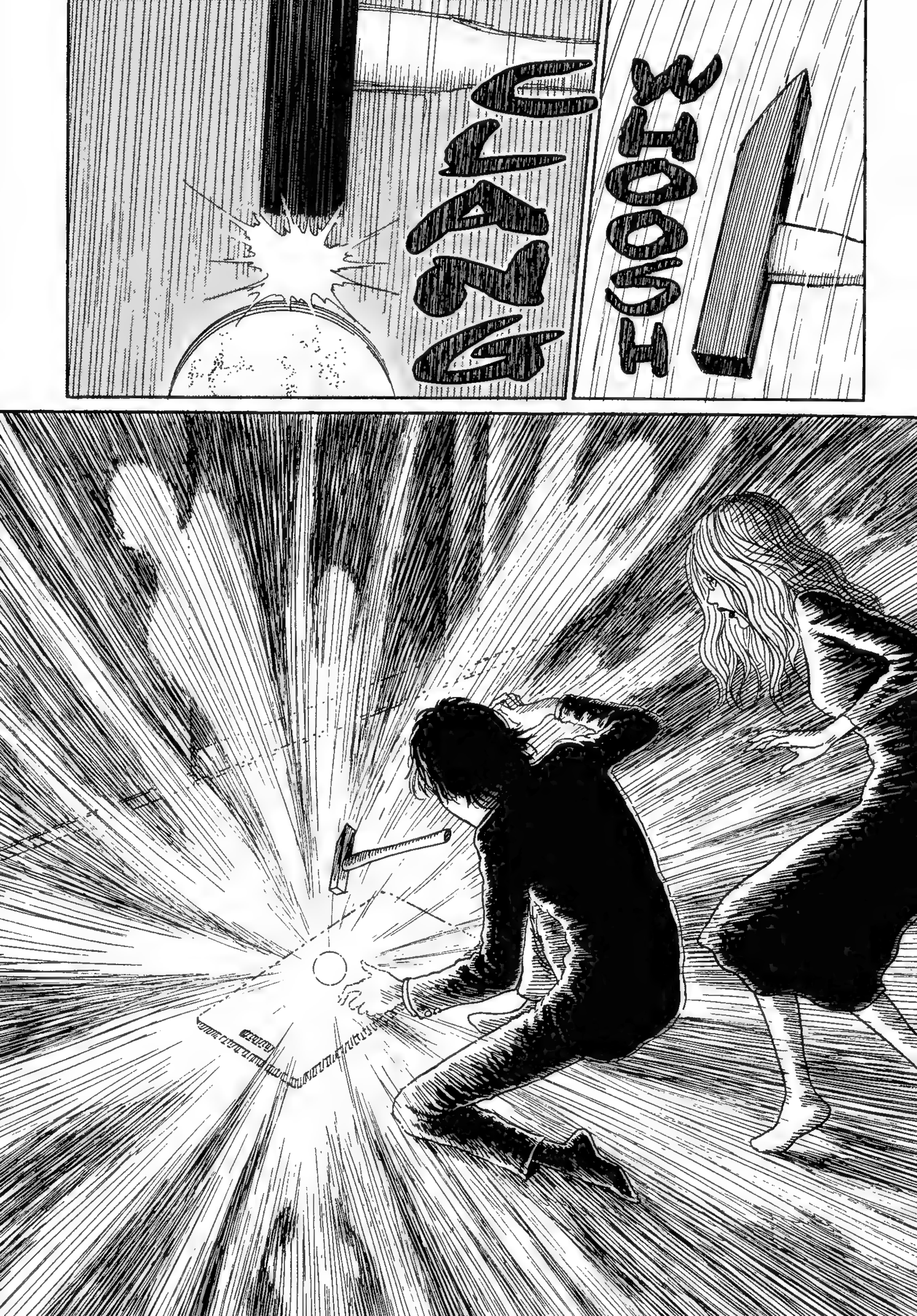
IF IT'S SO HARD, THEN HOW ABOUT WE GIVE IT A TEST?

HMPH.

WHAT'S A LITTLE CURSE?

DON'T BLAME ME IF YOU GET CURSED.

YOU WANT TO SPLIT THE SOUL?


WHOOSH
CLANG

SHAAAH
GYEAAAH
EEEEE

AAAH!

WHOA!

EEEAH!

SOMETHING JUST WENT THROUGH ME!

AAAA

HEY! BARAC-CHI!

UNNH.

W-WHAT WAS THAT?!

COUNT-LESS SHADOWS ...

S-SOME-THING'S WRONG IN HERE.

RIGHT ...

I'M BARAC-CHI.

BARAC-CHI?

YOUR APART-MENT, BARACCHI!

AH!

WHERE AM I?

THE STONE... WHAT ABOUT THE STONE?!

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

I HAD DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES IN THE DREAM. AND I LIVED IN ALL DIFFERENT ERAS.

I...I HAD A DREAM JUST NOW. A LONG DREAM...

IT'S NOT SHINING AS BRIGHTLY.

MAYBE BECAUSE IT RELEASED WHATEVER THAT WAS?

SO THEN, ALL THOSE PEOPLE...

...WERE THE DEAD AFTER LIVING THROUGH THE CYCLE OF REBIRTH?

LIKE IT RELEASED ENERGY.

WAS THAT SPIRIT ENERGY?

KACHAK

KACHAK

لا يا
لا يا
لا

ITS BATTER-IES ARE DEAD.

W- WHY'S IT MOVING ?

HURRY AND DIE.

WE'LL DIE TO-GETHER.

AAAH!

VWEEN

VWEEN

KSHK

KSHK

KSHK

KSHK

KSHK

KSHK

KSHK

TAK

ROLL ROLL ROLL

ROLL ROLL TUNK TUNK

VWEEN

VWEEN

VWEEN

PARADONITE MIGHT BE EVEN MORE AMAZING THAN WE THOUGHT.

WHAT IF THAT ENERGY IT RELEASED IS MOVING THE ROBOT NOW, EVEN THOUGH ITS BATTERIES ARE DEAD?

MAYBE THE STONE HAS SOME SPECIAL MEANING FOR HIM.

W-WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT?

YOUR NEW MOVIE'S A SMASH HIT! AND REVIEWERS ARE IMPRESSED BY YOUR PERFORMANCE.

RAY TANIO! YOUR STAR IS TRULY ON THE RISE THESE DAYS!

THIS STONE GIVES ME POWER AND SHOWS ME THE WAY. I COULD EVEN BELIEVE THAT THIS STONE IS GOD.

OH, WELL, IT'S ALL THANKS TO THIS GEM.

HE'S BEEN WEIRD EVER SINCE HE GOT THAT STONE. IT'S REALLY OBVIOUS.

RAY'S BEEN KIND OF SCREWY LATELY, YEAH?

WHISPER WHISPER

WHISPER WHISPER

RECENTLY, I'VE BEEN THINKING.

IT'S HARDER THAN DIAMOND, THOUGH, SO SPLITTING IT IS TOUGH.

I SHOULD SHARE IT WITH PEOPLE.

I CAN'T KEEP THIS WONDERFUL STONE ALL TO MYSELF.

SHEEF

WHAT ?!

CHAK

...IF I USE THIS...

BUT ...

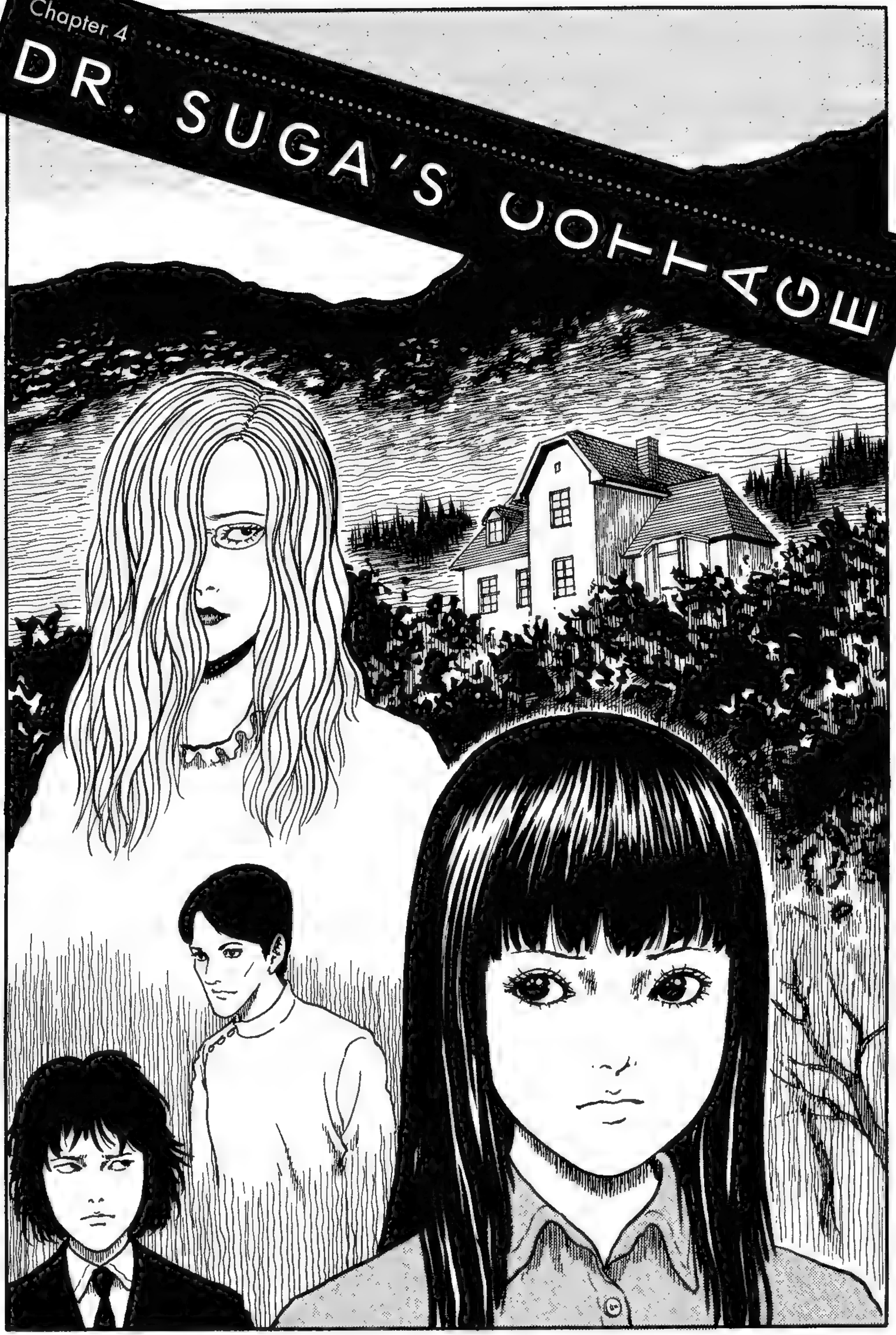
BANG

THEY WERE RECORDING A VARIETY SHOW IN THE STUDIO, BUT GIVEN THAT THERE WERE NO SURVIVORS, THERE WAS NO ONE WHO COULD GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT HAPPENED THERE.

THAT DAY, A FAMOUS TV STATION MELTED AND COLLAPSED INWARD DUE TO AN ENORMOUS BURST OF ENERGY. THE CENTER OF THE IMPLOSION WAS THOUGHT TO BE STUDIO A.

Chapter 4

DR. SUGA'S UCHIAGE

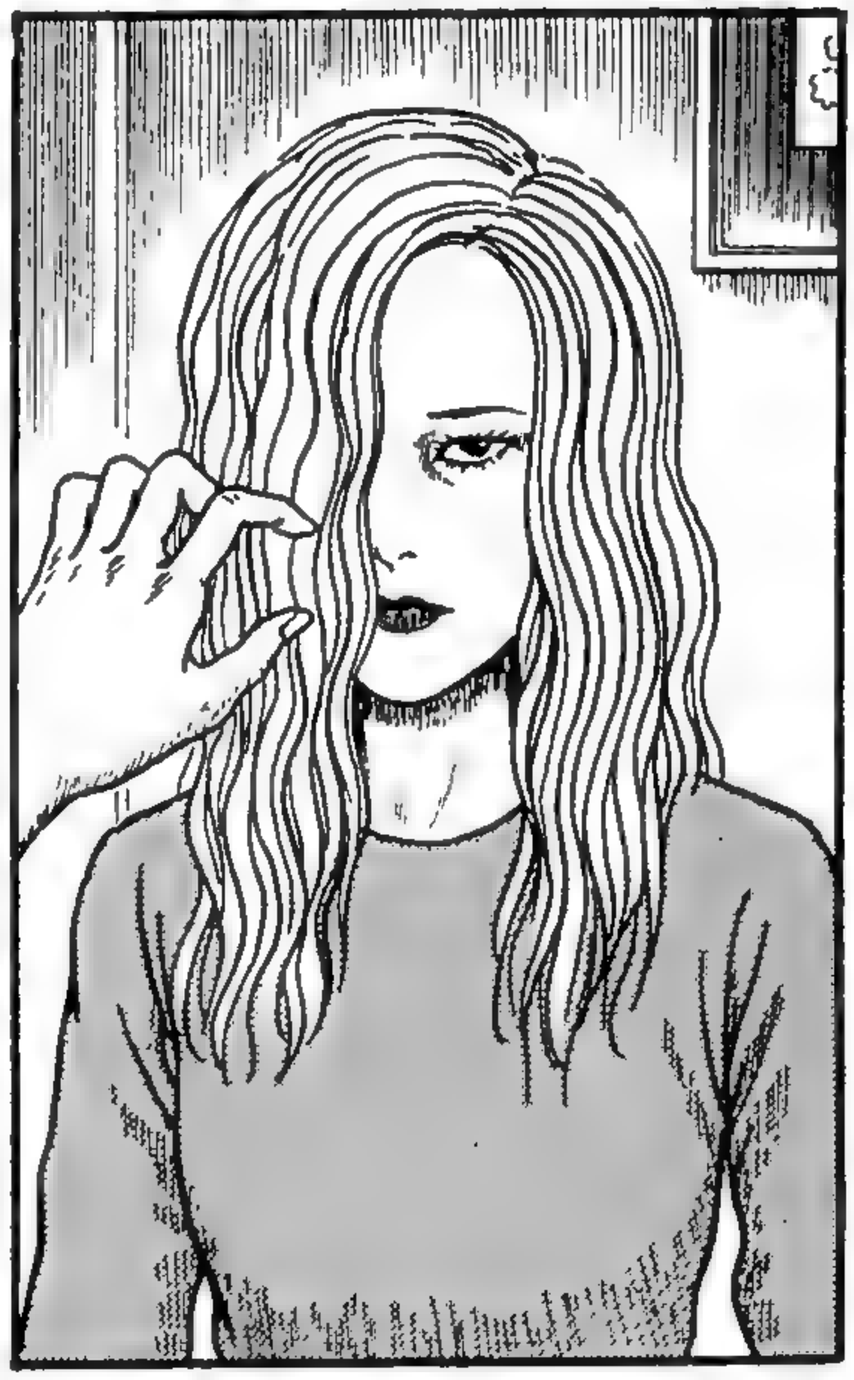


THE CENTER OF THE BLAST APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A JEWELER'S.

THERE HAS BEEN YET ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS LARGE EXPLOSION.

AND THE CAUSE? WE CAN'T RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A SERIES OF TERRORIST ATTACKS!

IT LOOKS LESS LIKE AN EXPLOSION AND MORE LIKE THE BUILDING MELTED!



DON'T WORRY, MS. HIRATANI.

DOCTOR, CAN YOU REALLY GET RID OF THIS BIRTH-MARK?

ONCE IT'S GROWN ENOUGH, WE'LL REMOVE THE BIRTHMARK AND TRANSPLANT THE NEW SKIN.

WE'RE CULTIVATING THE HEALTHY SKIN WE COLLECTED FROM YOU BEFORE.

KLAKKA KLAKKA KLAKKA KLAKKA

PLEASE HELP US! WE NEED ALL HANDS ON DECK!

DOCTOR SUGA, THERE'S BEEN ANOTHER EXPLOSION. WE'VE GOT INCOMING PATIENTS!

THE CONDITION OF THE SKIN... I'VE NEVER SEEN BURNS LIKE THIS.

WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH SPACE!

THEY WERE.

WHAT? THEIR BURNS FROM THE EXPLOSION WERE...?

PREPARE THE ARTIFICIAL SKIN!

...

EXACTLY, TABURO.

BARACCHI, THAT SOUNDS LIKE A MORE SERIOUS VERSION OF THE BURNS WE GOT AT YOUR PLACE THAT NIGHT.

SO THAT'S WHY YOU MOVED INTO THIS LUXURY CONDO WITH YOUR PARADONITE RICHES?

SO DO I. AND MY APARTMENT WAS RUINED.

I STILL HAVE THE BURN MARKS.

WELL, *YOU* BOUGHT A MANSION WITH AN OCEAN VIEW, DIDN'T YOU?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN, THOUGH, THAT THEIR BURNS AND OURS ARE SO SIMILAR?

THIS TIME, IT WAS A JEWELER, SO I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF THEY'D HAD SOME PARADONITE.

APPARENTLY, RAY TANIO WAS IN THE STUDIO WHERE THE FIRST ONE HAPPENED, AND HE OWNED A PARADONITE STONE.

WHAT?

IT MIGHT BE THAT PARADONITE CAUSED THE EXPLOSION.

IF YOU WERE TO HIT IT EVEN HARDER THAN THAT, THAT EXPLOSIVE ENERGY MIGHT COME ALL AT ONCE.

THAT NIGHT, WE DISCOVERED THE STONE RELEASES A POWERFUL ENERGY WHEN YOU HIT IT.

AND WE'VE MADE A BUNDLE.

IT IS OUT THERE ON THE MARKET, AFTER ALL.

KSHK

KSHK

KSHK

AND THAT ENERGY ALSO GOT THE PII-TAN ROBOT MOVING AGAIN AFTER HIS BATTERIES DIED.

YES. WE GOT OFF WITH MINIMAL BURNS BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T.

SO THEN IF I'D HIT IT HARDER THAT NIGHT...

KUCHI

KUCHI

REALLY MADE HIMSELF AT HOME HERE, *HM?*

IT'S BEEN A MONTH, AND IT'S STILL MOVING. THAT'S QUITE THE ENERGY SOURCE.

I KEEP TRYING, AND I DON'T DIE.

VWEN

VWEN

VWEN

VWEN

I CAN'T DIE...

HM? WHAT?

HELLO, YAMANISHI.

IT'S YAMANISHI FROM JEWELRY R.

POK

THEY WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT PARADONITE IS A TERRORIST WEAPON.

W-WHAT?!

THEY'VE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT PARADONITE IS THE CAUSE OF THE EXPLOSIONS.

HIRATANI, STAY CALM AND LISTEN. THE POLICE ARE ON THEIR WAY TO SEE YOU.

WHAT?

THEY'LL LIKELY CONFISCATE THE STONES, THOUGH.

WHO YOU GOT THE STONES FROM, HOW MANY YOU HAVE.

JUST TELL THEM THE TRUTH.

I KNOW BETTER THAN ANYONE YOU'RE NOT A TERRORIST, GIVEN HOW LONG I'VE KNOWN YOU IN THE GEM BUSINESS.

UGH. TALKING WITH THE COPS WILL NOT END WELL.

...

POK

NOW.

ALL WE CAN DO IS RUN.

THEN WHAT DO WE DO?

I MEAN, THE PARADONITE CAME FROM PII-TAN'S STOMACH? WE TELL THEM THAT, AND WE'LL ONLY SEEM MORE SUSPICIOUS.

WHO'D BELIEVE THE TRUTH EVEN IF WE TOLD THEM?

DO WHAT YOU WANT! I'M OUT OF HERE!

WAIT! I HAVE TO GET SOME THINGS.

JUST LEAVE THEM!

RUN? RUN WHERE?! WHAT ABOUT THE STONES?!

TAKE ME WITH YOU.

YOU'RE GOING TO KILL YOURSELF, RIGHT?

THIS GUY...

DAM-MIT.

AH!

AVAZ

COFFEE

COFFEE!

GREAT. I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D COME.

NO, DOCTOR SUGA.

KIKUCHI, WERE YOU WAITING LONG?

NO...

YOU'VE BEEN OFF WORK ALL THIS TIME. YOU'RE NOT WELL?

WHAT?

YOU'VE THOUGHT ABOUT DYING?

FWSH

I'VE BEEN OVERWHELMED WITH THIS ANXIETY. I DIDN'T THINK I COULD CARRY OUT MY DUTIES.

I'M SORRY. I...

WE'VE BEEN RUN RAGGED AT THE HOSPITAL WITH ALL THOSE EXPLOSIONS. IT'S FINALLY CALMING DOWN NOW.

...

I CAN TELL THAT MUCH JUST LOOKING AT YOU. IT'S NOT GOOD TO HIDE IN YOUR HOUSE.

...

THERE'S NO ONE THERE. PERFECT FOR A REST.

I KNOW. HOW ABOUT YOU COME TO MY COTTAGE? IT'S A QUIET PLACE, IN THE MOUNTAINS.

EARLIER, DOZENS OF PARADONITE STONES WERE DISCOVERED AMONG THE EFFECTS AT EACH OF THEIR RESIDENCES.

POLICE ARE LOOKING FOR THE TWO PEOPLE WHO PUT PARADONITE ON THE MARKET AS KEY WITNESSES IN RELATION TO THE SERIES OF BUILDING EXPLOSIONS.

AND PII-TAN IS PROOF OF OUR INNOCENCE.

I'M SURE SHE KNOWS WHERE PII-TAN IS.

WHAT'S THE POINT IN FOL-LOWING MARUSO NOW?

WELL, I GUESS WE'RE BACK AT SQUARE ONE AND SUICIDE?

SHH! SHE'S COMING OUT.

I SERIOUSLY DOUBT HE'S ALIVE.

WHAT'S HE GOT TO DO WITH MARUSO?

SUGA? HE'S THE ONE TREATING YOUR BIRTHMARK, RIGHT?

...AND NOW FOUND SHE'S WITH DOCTOR SUGA.

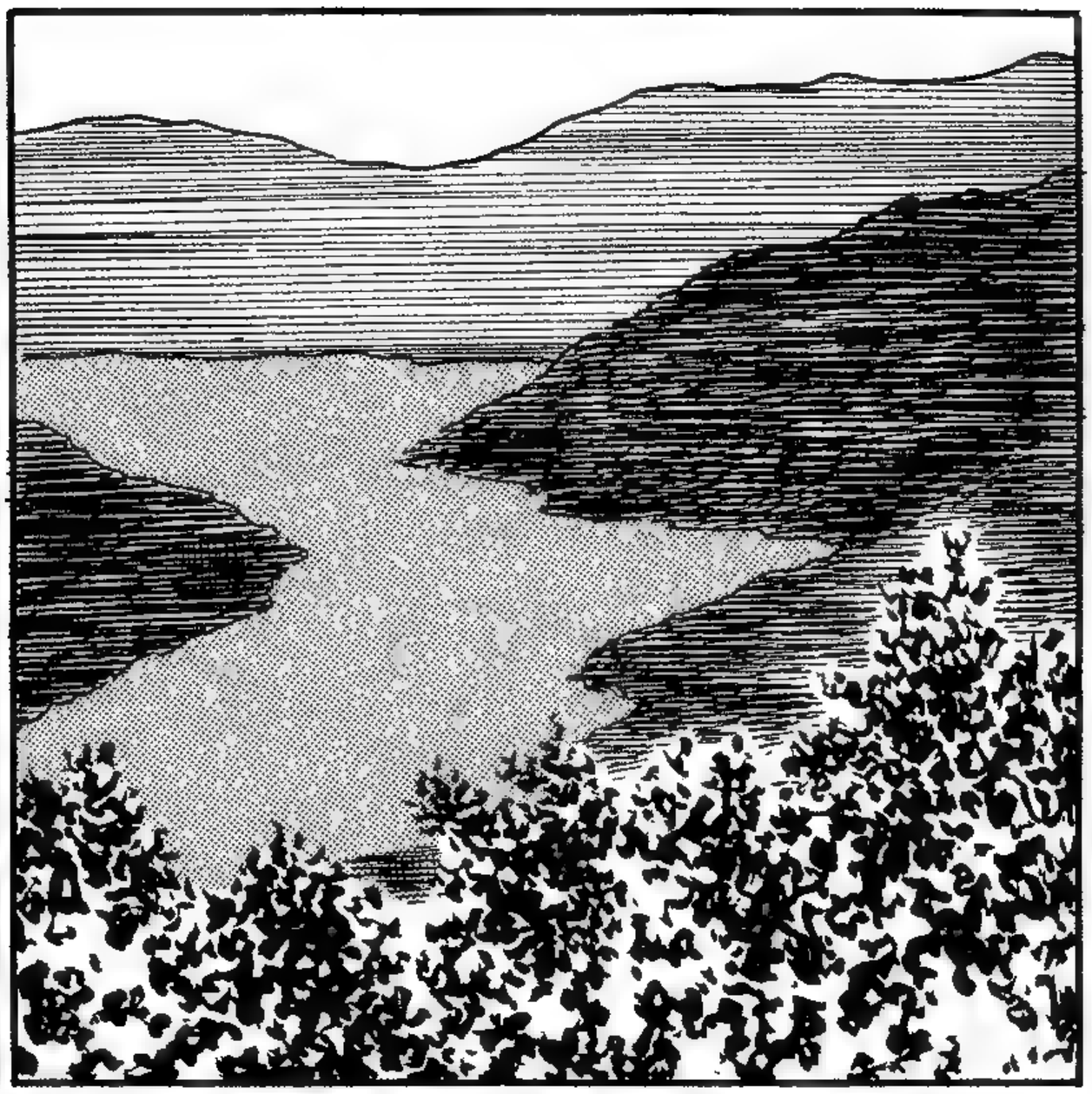
THIS IS A SURPRISE. WE DID ALL THIS WORK TO FIND MARUSO...

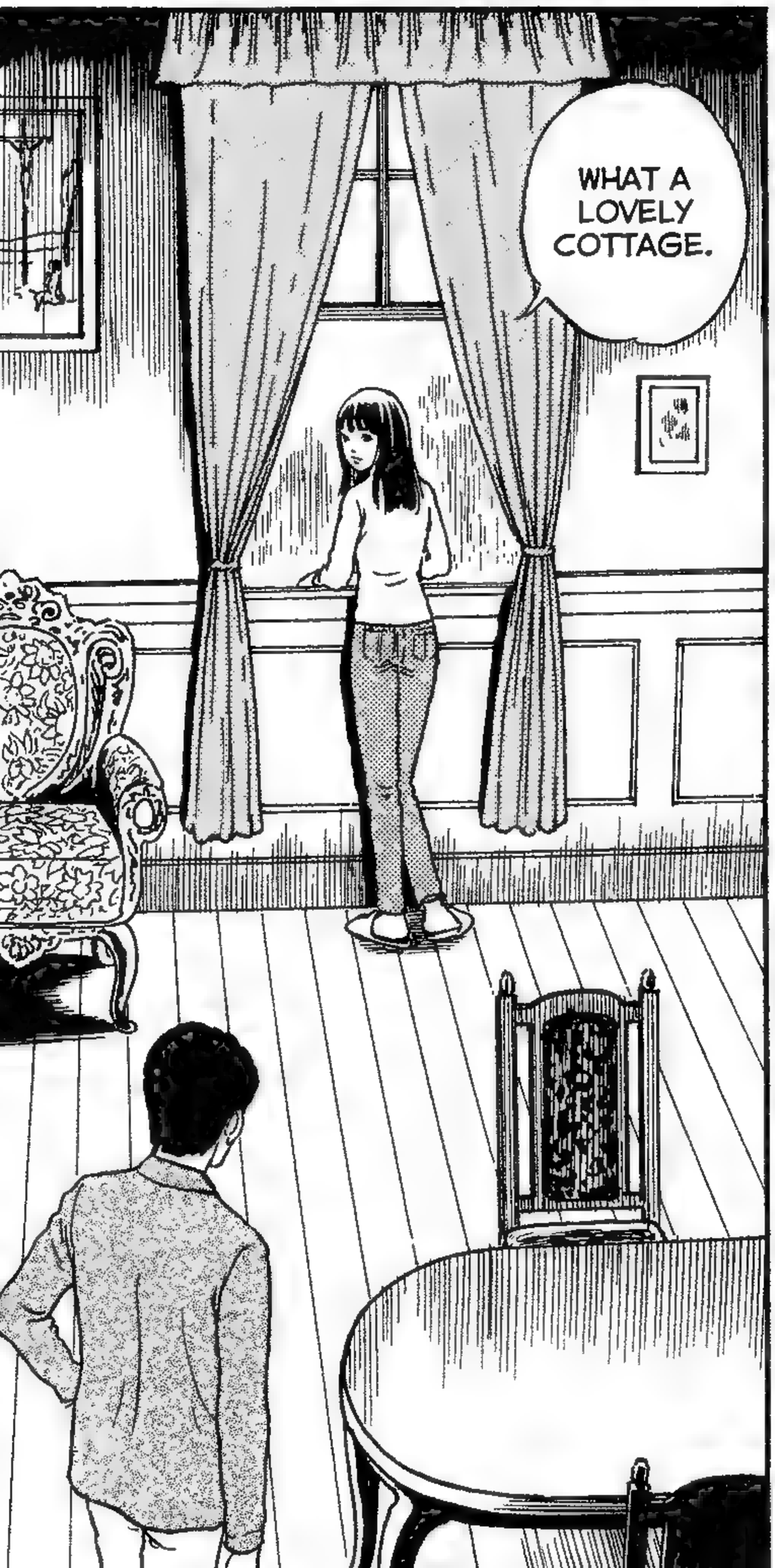
AND THAT WAS MY ONLY HOPE FOR LIFE.

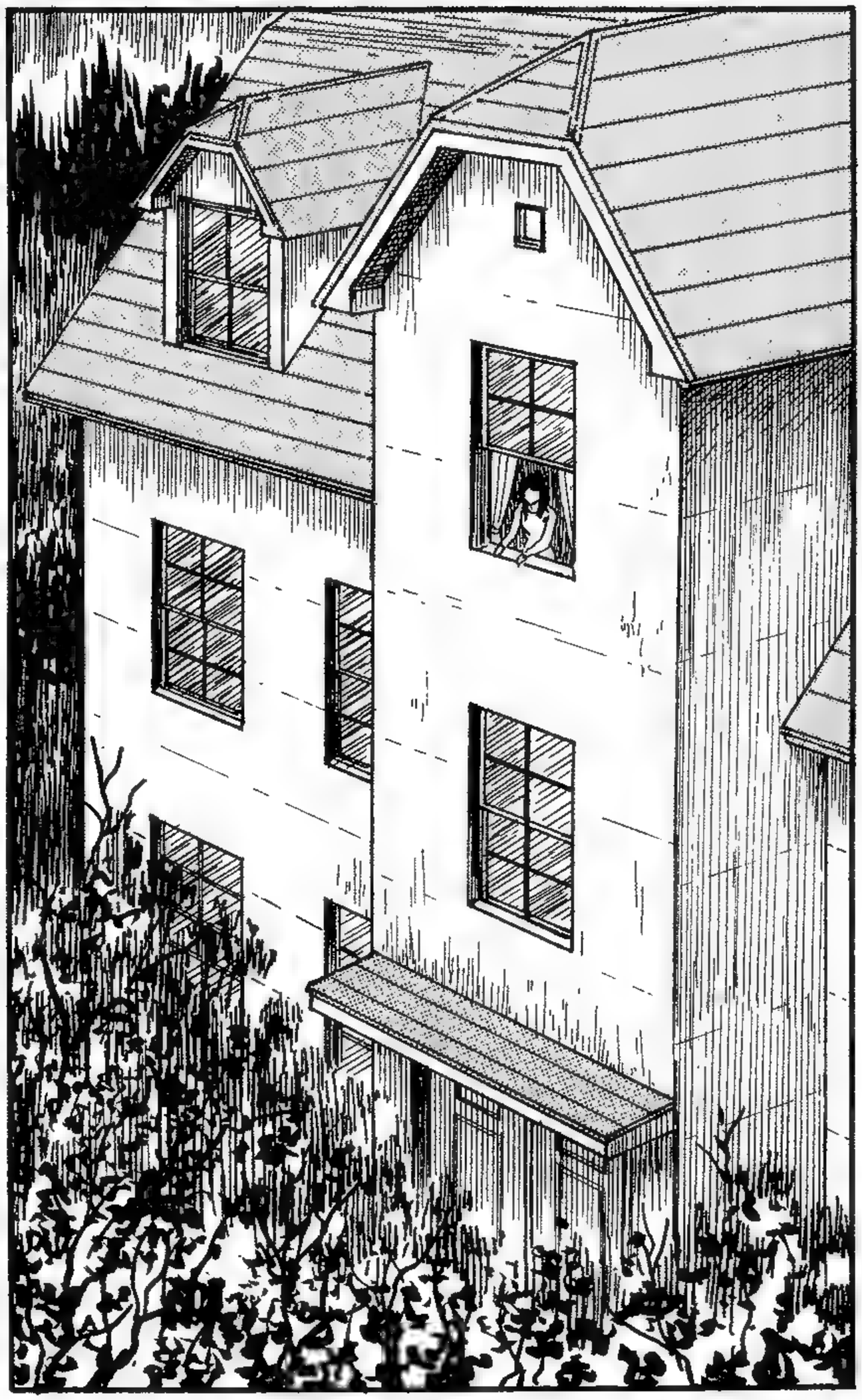
I MIGHT NOT HAVE A CHANCE TO FIX THIS BIRTHMARK NOW.

HM? WHAT'S WRONG, BARACCHI?

WELL, I GUESS NONE OF US KNEW ANYTHING ABOUT EACH OTHER.




WHAT A LOVELY COTTAGE.



I WANT YOU TO HURRY AND GET BACK TO YOUR OLD SELF. I WANT TO SEE YOUR SMILE.

I'M MORE THAN HAPPY TO HAVE YOU.

I FEEL BAD SOMEHOW.

STAY AS LONG AS YOU WANT. THERE'S PLENTY OF FOOD.

DOCTOR ...

KIKU-CHI.

WELL, LOOK AT HER.

YOU STAY THE HELL IN THERE, FAKE PII-TAN.

HEEEY! LET ME OUT OF HEEEERE!

THAT NIGHT ...

I CAME HERE BECAUSE IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD CHANGE OF PACE.

BUT THE ANXIETY'S ACTUALLY GOTTEN WORSE.

WHAT IS THIS TERRIBLE FEELING ?!

I'M SO ANX-IOUS.

DOCTOR!

DOCTOR!

DOC-
TOR...

DOCTOR!
WHERE
ARE YOU?

WHERE
...

DOCTOR!!

16

THE
BASE-
MENT.

KREE

KACHAK

KACHAK

ROLL ROLL ROLL

EEE!

WHY IS THERE ALL THIS PARA-DONITE?

D-DOCTOR ...

I WAS ON DUTY AT THE HOSPITAL.

IT HAP-PENED ONE NIGHT.

YES, THIS IS PARA-DONITE.

I DIDN'T REALLY KNOW HOW TO BRING IT UP.

KLAKA KLAKA

IT SEEMED SUSPI-CIOUS, SO I LOOKED INSIDE.

I NOTICED A CAR PARKED OUTSIDE THE EMERGENCY ENTRANCE.

HIS STOMACH WAS RIPPED OPEN.

AND THERE WERE ALL THESE BEAUTIFUL STONES. I'D NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THEM.

HIS BODY WAS JUST LYING THERE.

EVERY SO OFTEN, A STONE WOULD SHOOT OUT OF HIS PYLORUS.

BUT WHAT REALLY DREW MY EYE WAS DEEP IN HIS STOMACH.

AND IN THIS OPENING, I SAW IT. A DAZZLING WORLD.

THE PYLORUS ...

THIS MAN WITH THE STOMACH LEADING TO ANOTHER WORLD.

KIKUCHI, WHO *IS* HE?

YES, ANOTHER WORLD.

I'M SURE I SAW A WORLD THAT WAS NOT THIS ONE.

I REALLY DON'T KNOW ANYTHING.

I... I DON'T KNOW WHO HE IS.

I SAW YOU RUNNING AWAY.

YOU BROUGHT HIM TO THE HOSPITAL, YES?

...

WHAT'S WRONG?

BARACCHI, YOU'RE AWFULLY QUIET.

MEANWHILE, WE'RE UP HERE IN THE MOUNTAINS, FREEZING AROUND A FIRE.

RIGHT ABOUT NOW, MARUSO AND THAT DOCTOR ARE GETTING ALL COZY, DRINKING WINE IN A BIG, SOFT BED.

IT INFECTED OR SOME-THING?

ITCHY?

GLUG

MY BIRTHMARK'S ITCHY FOR SOME REASON.

YOU WON'T FEEL IT WHEN WE'RE DEAD.

WHAT? GIMME A BREAK.

IT'S STARTED THROB-BING.

AAAAH! IT'S SO DISTURBING.

UNH ...

HUDUWUDU

THUMP

THUMP

THESE STONES ...

B-BARACCHI!

AAAAH!

THMP

THMP

COULDN'T YOU SAVE HIM?

D-DOCTOR, WHAT ABOUT PII-TAN? WHERE IS HE?

RIGHT BEHIND YOU.

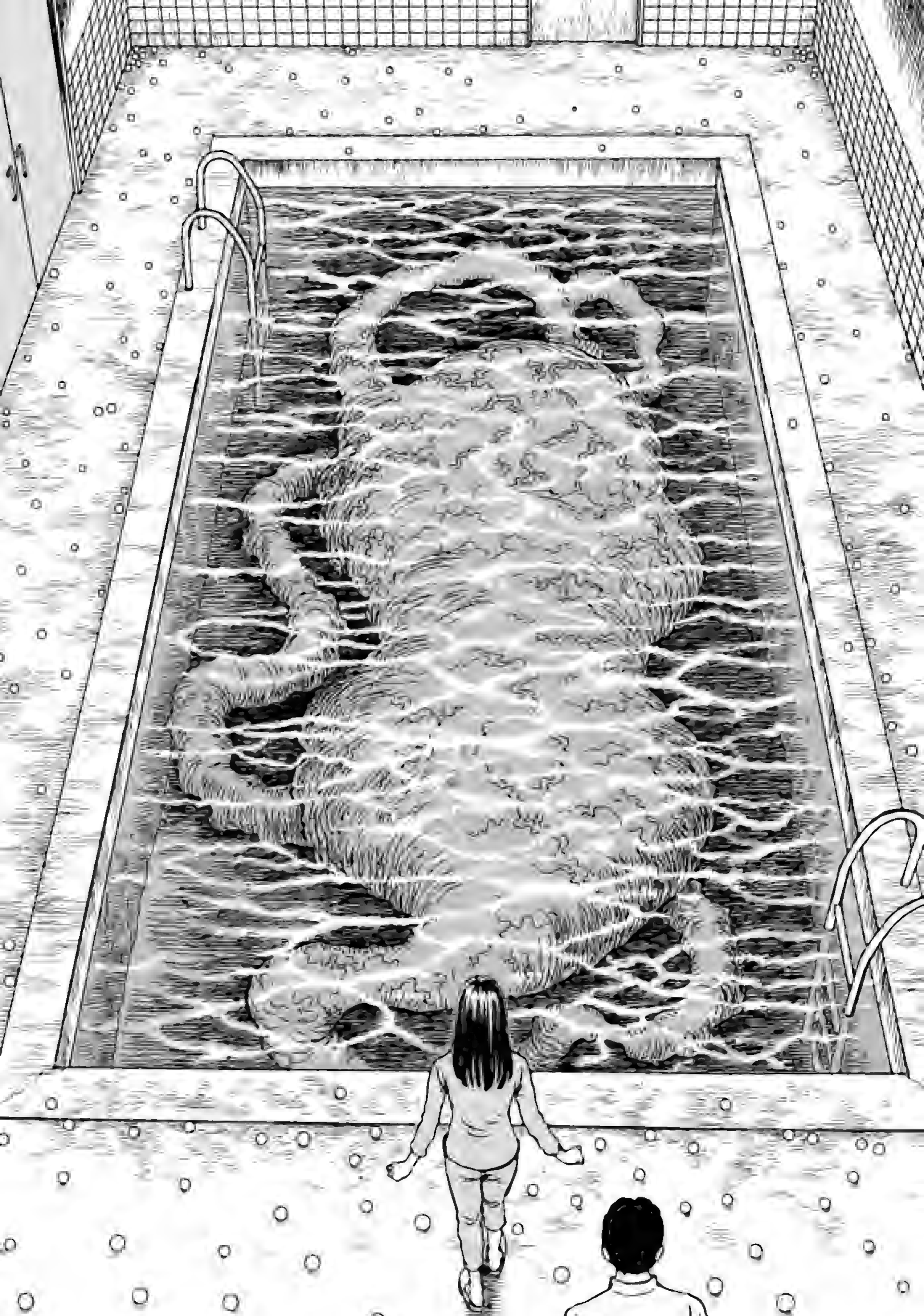
THERE.

WHERE IS HE NOW?!

R-REALLY?!

HE'S ALIVE. I SAVED HIS LIFE.

PII-TAN? IS THAT HIS NICKNAME?



BUT THE BEAUTIFUL STONES HAVE BASICALLY STOPPED COMING OUT.

I WAS ABLE TO GROW THEM LIKE THIS—THANKS TO MY MEDICAL SPECIALTY.

HIS BRAIN WAS ALREADY DEAD. BUT I CULTIVATED HIS STOMACH CELLS WHILE HE WAS STILL ALIVE.

MOST LIKELY, THERE AREN'T ANY MORE STONES NEAR THE ENTRANCE TO THE OTHER WORLD.

WHY... WHY WOULD YOU DO THIS?

I-IT CAN'T BE.

TH-THIS IS PII-TAN'S STOMACH ?!

DING DONG

AND THE BIGGER THAT DOORWAY...

ISN'T IT OBVIOUS? WE COULDN'T LOSE THE DOORWAY TO THAT DAZZLING WORLD.

DASH

WHO COULD THAT BE? AT THIS TIME OF NIGHT, THIS FAR INTO THE MOUNTAINS ...

DING DONG

D-ZO DOG

DING DONG

DING DONG

DING DONG

HELP!

KREEEEE

HELP ME!

BAM

KACHAK

BARAC-CHI?

B—

AAA

AAAH!

SOME-THING'S WRONG WITH IT!

CUT THIS... THIS BIRTHMARK OFF OF ME! HURRY, DO THE TRANSPLANT!

DOCTOR! DOCTOR SUGA!

SLAGGER

AH!

AH!

SNAK

29

THE SURGERY ON MY BIRTHMARK ENDED A WHILE AGO.

MARUSO, YOU WERE PASSED OUT FOR QUITE SOME TIME.

I HAD TO DO IT WITH STONES CONSTANTLY FLYING OUT OF THE BIRTHMARK.

IT WAS A DIFFICULT OPERA-TION.

...AND CONTINUED TO COME OUT OF THE REMOVED BIRTHMARK.

THE DOOR-WAY WAS IN THE BIRTH-MARK.

STRANGELY, WHEN I CUT IT AWAY, THE STONES STOPPED COMING OUT OF HIRATANI'S FACE...

TCH!

YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING.

IT'S STRANGE. FIRST PII-TAN, AND THEN A DOOR TO THE OTHER WORLD OPENS IN BARACCHI.

YOU'RE ALL FRIENDS, YES? IS THERE PERHAPS SOME COMMON ELEMENT?

A MONTH LATER.

THE DAY OF BARAC-CHI'S BANDAGE REMOVAL.

DOCTOR, THIS SCAR...

DON'T WORRY. IT WILL GRADUALLY FADE.

AAAH, HOW LONG DO WE HAVE TO LIE LOW HERE?

WE'VE GOT PROOF OF OUR INNOCENCE NOW, YEAH?

TABURO.

BE PATIENT A LITTLE LONGER.

IN THE BASEMENT, SEPARATE FROM PII-TAN'S STOMACH...

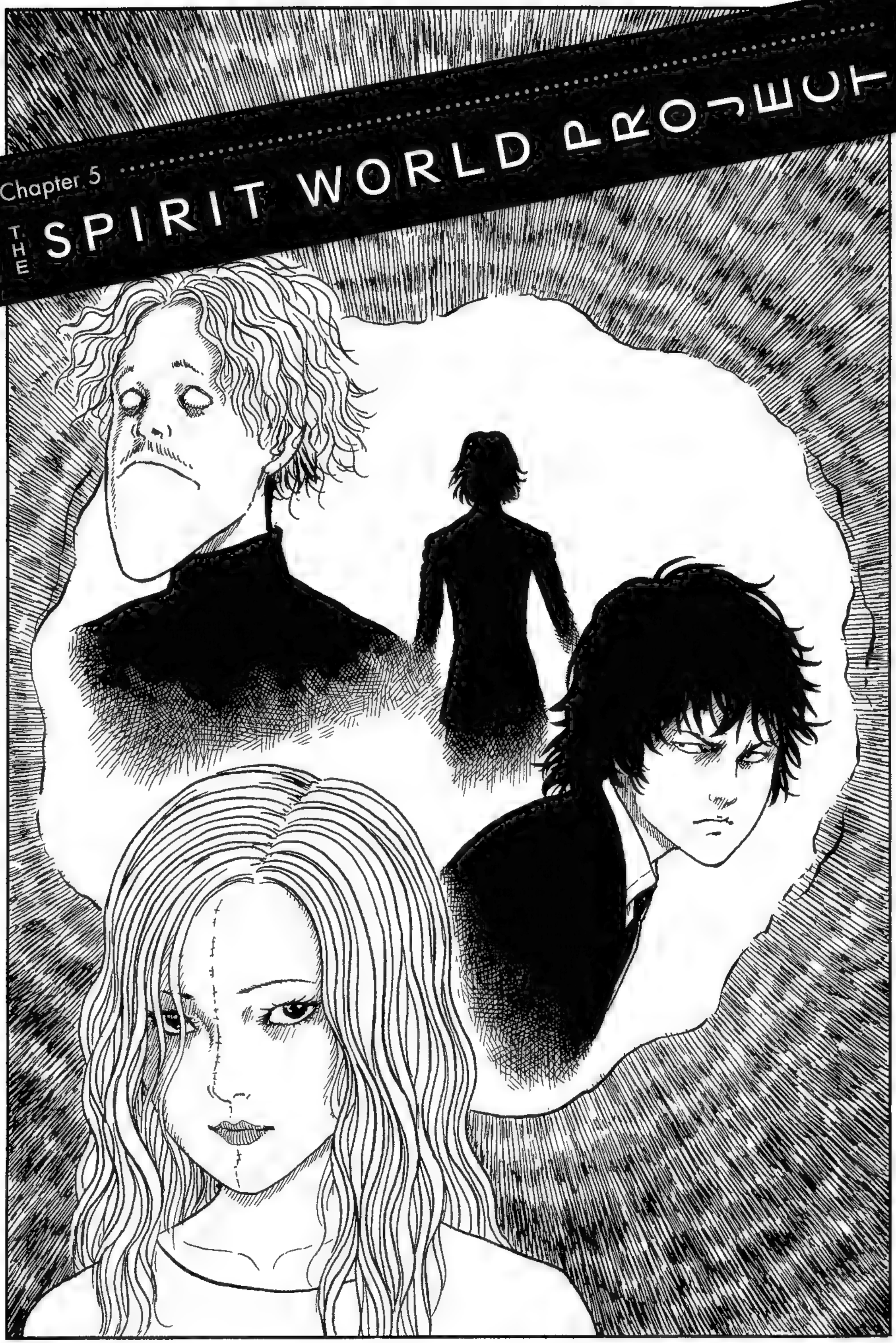
...BARACCHI'S BIRTHMARK WAS BEING CULTIVATED IN AN ENORMOUS PETRI DISH.

MAD... THIS IS MAD-NESS...

WHAT ON EARTH ARE THEY TRYING TO DO HERE?!

Chapter 5

THE SPIRIT WORLD PROTOCOL



SOME-
THING
TERRIFY-
ING IS
GOING TO
HAPPEN...

I...
I CAN
SENSE
IT...

SCARED
...

SO
SCARED
...

THE DOOR-WAY IS BRIGHT. YOU'LL SEE IT RIGHT AWAY.

I WANT YOU TO GO IN AND REPORT WHAT YOU SEE.

YES. THERE'S AN ENTRANCE TO ANOTHER ROOM IN THAT SAC.

SO WHAT, THEN? THIS JOB, ALL I HAVE TO DO IS GO INTO THIS KIND OF CREEPY SAC?

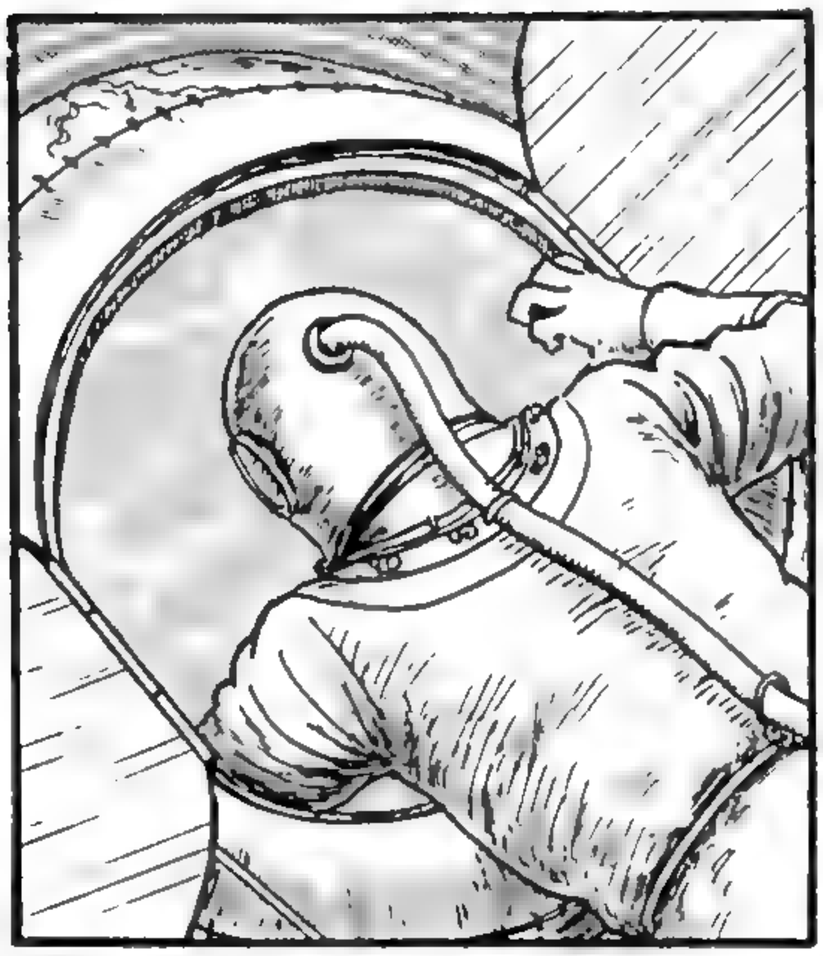
NOW, LET'S BEGIN.

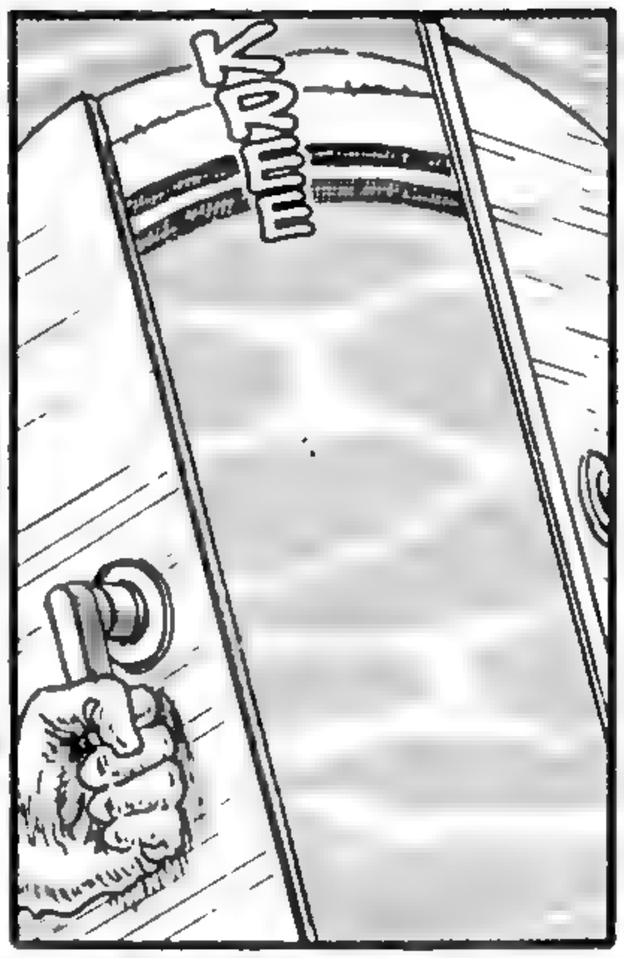
NO NEED TO WORRY.

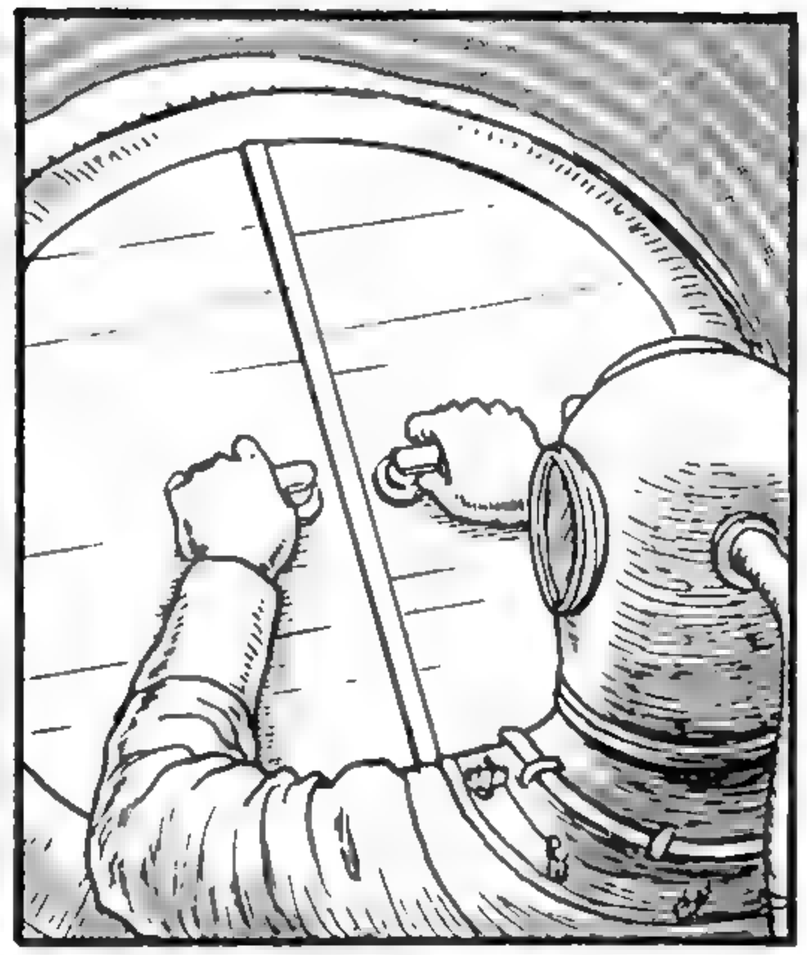
I'M REALLY GOING TO GET THE MONEY YOU PROMISED, RIGHT?

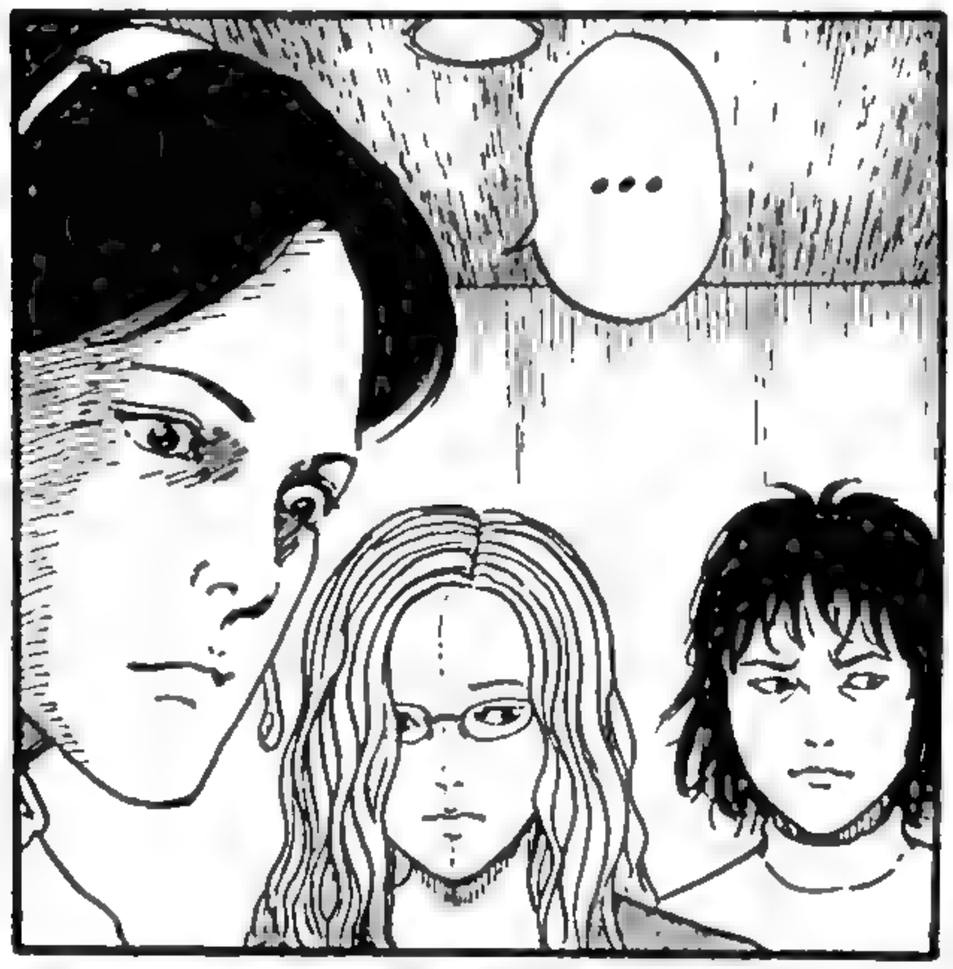
BRINGING ME ALL THE WAY TO THIS HOUSE IN THE MOUNTAINS... THIS SOME KIND OF EXPERIMENT?

CHAK




KRUM

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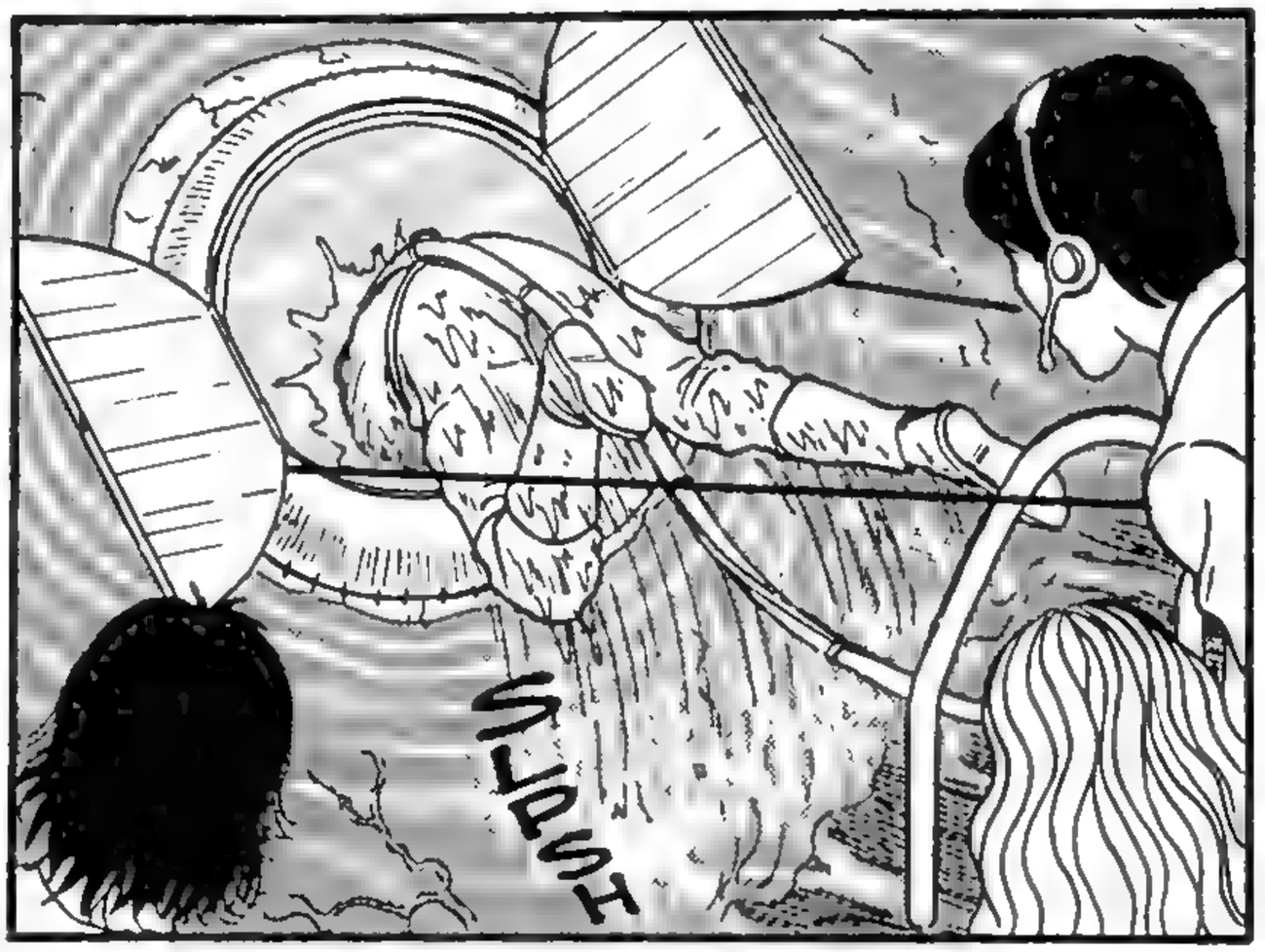
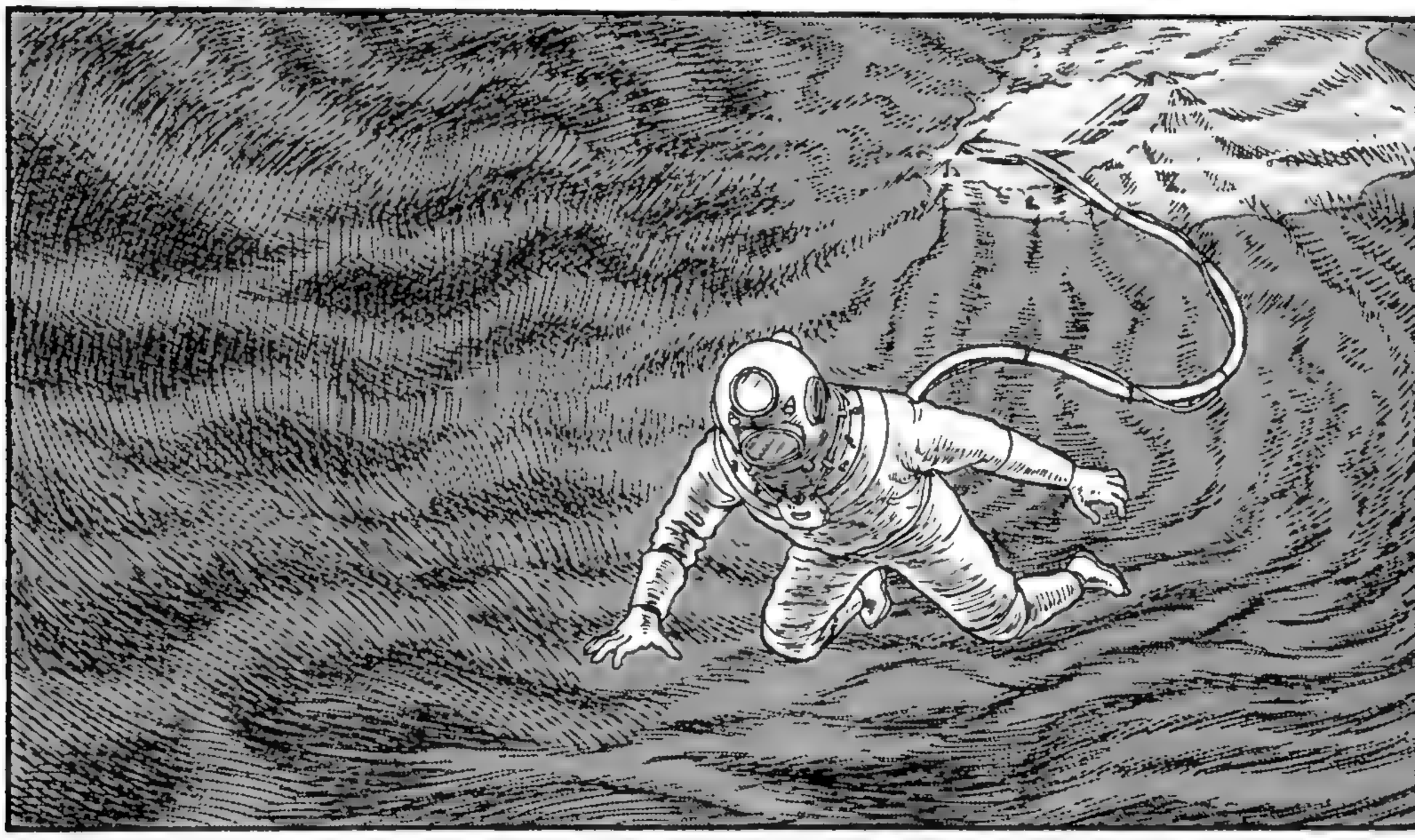

SLURP



WHA...

WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?!

CAN YOU HEAR ME?

I'M GOING IN.

JERK

BZZT

WHAT'S WRONG?

WHY'D YOU STOP?

TABURO! HELP ME PULL HIM OUT!

DAMMIT. SO THAT WON'T WORK, THEN!

TUG
TUG
TUG
TUG
TUG
SPLOOSH

WHY DID HE LOOK LIKE THAT?

THAT CORPSE.

THAT'S WHY I DECIDED TO GO AHEAD AND SEND A PERSON IN.

ALL THE VIDEO CAMERAS AND RECORDING INSTRUMENTS UP TO NOW HAVE BROKEN.

THE ATMOSPHERE IN THE OTHER WORLD MUST BE TOTALLY DIFFERENT FROM OURS.

I SHOULD HAVE STARTED WITH REACHING OUT TO INSTITUTIONS AND DEVELOPING AN EXPLORATORY DRONE.

SACRIFICES ARE INEVITABLE IN NEW VENTURES. BUT I DID ACTUALLY RUSH THIS.

SUGA, YOU'RE A SCARY GUY.

WELL, IF YOU'RE GIVING OUT WADS OF CASH, ANY NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN TOWN'LL JUMP TO TAKE IT.

BUT THIS CAN'T BE DEALT WITH AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL.

I DON'T WANT TO EXAG-GERATE THINGS HERE.

SUGA, WHAT EXACTLY IS YOUR GAME HERE?

INSTITU-TIONS?

10

THE PARADONITE THAT EXISTS THERE—WHAT YOU CALL THE "SOULS"—IS A MINERAL THAT POSSESSES ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF ENERGY.

THIS IS CRITICAL, THE KEY TO THE FUTURE FOR RESOURCE-POOR JAPAN.

WE'LL HAVE TO MOBILIZE THE POWER OF THE NATION AND INVESTIGATE THIS OTHER WORLD—WHAT YOU ALL HAD CALLED THE "SPIRIT WORLD."

A ROBOT?

OH, WAIT! WE ACTUALLY HAVE A ROBOT. RIGHT, BARACCHI?

SO YOU GET THE COUNTRY TO DEVELOP AN EXPLORATORY DRONE.

I GET IT.

KACHAK

KSH KSH KSH

VWEEEEEN

THAT PARA-DONITE IS REALLY SOME-THING ELSE.

YOU STILL HAVEN'T USED UP THAT ENERGY?!

OW NEE

THIS MASSIVE SAC IS THE STOMACH OF THE *REAL* PII-TAN.

HEY, PII-TAN.

A DOOR TO THE OTHER SIDE?

WELL, THERE'S A DOOR TO THE OTHER SIDE IN THIS STOMACH.

YOU WANTED TO DIE, RIGHT? EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE A ROBOT.

LET'S ALL GO THROUGH IT TOGETHER!

IS THERE REALLY? SO THEN, IF I GO THROUGH IT, I CAN DIE, RIGHT?

PLOSH

WE'LL COME LATER.

PROMISE.

ALTHOUGH I DO ACKNOWL-EDGE IT'S A CUTTING-EDGE MACHINE.

A SKINNY ROBOT LIKE THAT WON'T BE ABLE TO HOLD OUT FOR TOO LONG.

SLIP SLIP

HE'S MOVING FOR-WARD.

SLIP SLIP SLIP

HE'S STEADILY ADVANCING.

SLIP SLIP SLIP SLIP SLIP

...

HE'S STILL TRYING TO MOVE FORWARD.

TWANG TWANG

THAT'S THE END OF THE LINE.

ALL RIGHT! THAT'S ENOUGH! LET'S PULL HIM UP, TABURO!

TUG TUG

PUSH

A DAZZLING WORLD.
FULL OF LIGHT ...
TELL ME WHAT YOU SAW.
PII-TAN...

KLATTER

KLATTER

KLATTER

I... FLEW AROUND THE DAZZLING WORLD.

AND I PICKED UP SO MANY BEAUTIFUL STONES.

PII-TAN WENT BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN THIS WORLD AND THE "DAZZLING WORLD" MANY TIMES AFTER THAT.

SUGA CHRISTENED HIM "SPIRIT WORLD FLYER NO. 1."

WHAT?

WELL, BECAUSE IT'S MY STOMACH, OF COURSE.

STRANGE. ALL OF THE OTHER MEASUREMENT DEVICES WERE SMASHED TO PIECES, SO WHY WEREN'T YOU?

LET'S GO INTO ANOTHER ROOM.

OH... YES, OF COURSE.

I KNOW PII-TAN NEEDS YOU, TOO. BUT I'M SUPPOSED TO HAVE A CHECKUP TODAY, RIGHT?

DOCTOR SUGA.

THANK GOOD-NESS.

IF THIS KEEPS UP, IT'LL BE COM-PLETELY GONE IN A YEAR.

YOU'RE PRO-GRESSING NICELY. THE SCAR'S GOTTEN A LOT LESS NOTICEABLE.

...

I'M SUR-PRISINGLY GOOD.

DOCTOR. YOU CAN DO MAKEUP?

WHAT?

HOW ABOUT I GIVE YOU A MAKEOVER?

DOCTOR. I...

MY...

HOW'S IT LOOK?

THERE, ALL DONE.

OH! BY THE WAY.

...

YOU'RE REALLY BEAUTIFUL.

BARAC-CHI.

B-BUT... WHY ME?!

I'D LOVE FOR YOU TO DRESS UP AND MAKE AN APPEARANCE.

I'M PLANNING ON INVITING SOME VIPS AND ENGINEERS TO THE COTTAGE.

AAH, DOCTOR!

YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE I LOVE.

AND DO YOU THINK I COULD CONFINE A PERSON I LOVE LIKE THAT?

...SUFFERS MENTALLY. THERE'S NOTHING MORE I CAN DO FOR HER.

SHE...

I THOUGHT YOU LOVED HER?

SAY, DOCTOR. WHAT ABOUT MARUSO?

HMPH. IS THAT ALL IT IS? I'VE WONDERED IF THERE WAS SOMETHING GOING ON WITH THOSE TWO.

HER EXAMINATION SURE IS TAKING A LONG TIME.

I'LL MISS YOU.

WHAT? YOU'RE GOING?

WEEN

THIS THIRD WHEEL'S MOVING ON. WE'VE BEEN CLEARED OF THE TERRORISM CHARGES, SO...

HEY, PII-TAN! I'M GETTING OUT OF HERE.

MAYBE I'LL GO SAY BYE TO MARUSO.

OH YEAH.

LATER, PII-TAN.

AND THEN TELL THE WHOLE WORLD ABOUT SUGA'S EVIL DEEDS.

MAYBE I COULD TAKE HER WITH ME AND RUN. FIND THE KEY TO THOSE CUFFS.

NONE OF THIS IS HER FAULT.

SHE'S THE ONE GETTING A BUM DEAL HERE.

KACHAK

YOU OKAY?

MARUSO.

I... I CAN SENSE IT...

TO ME... AND TO YOU...

SOMETHING TERRIFYING'S GOING TO HAPPEN...

I'M SCARED ...

SO SCARED ...

...GOING TO HAPPEN TO YOU, TOO...

TABURO, SOMETHING TERRIFYING IS...

WHAT?

THEY'RE ALL A BUNCH OF LOONIES.

TCH!

VRRRRRRR

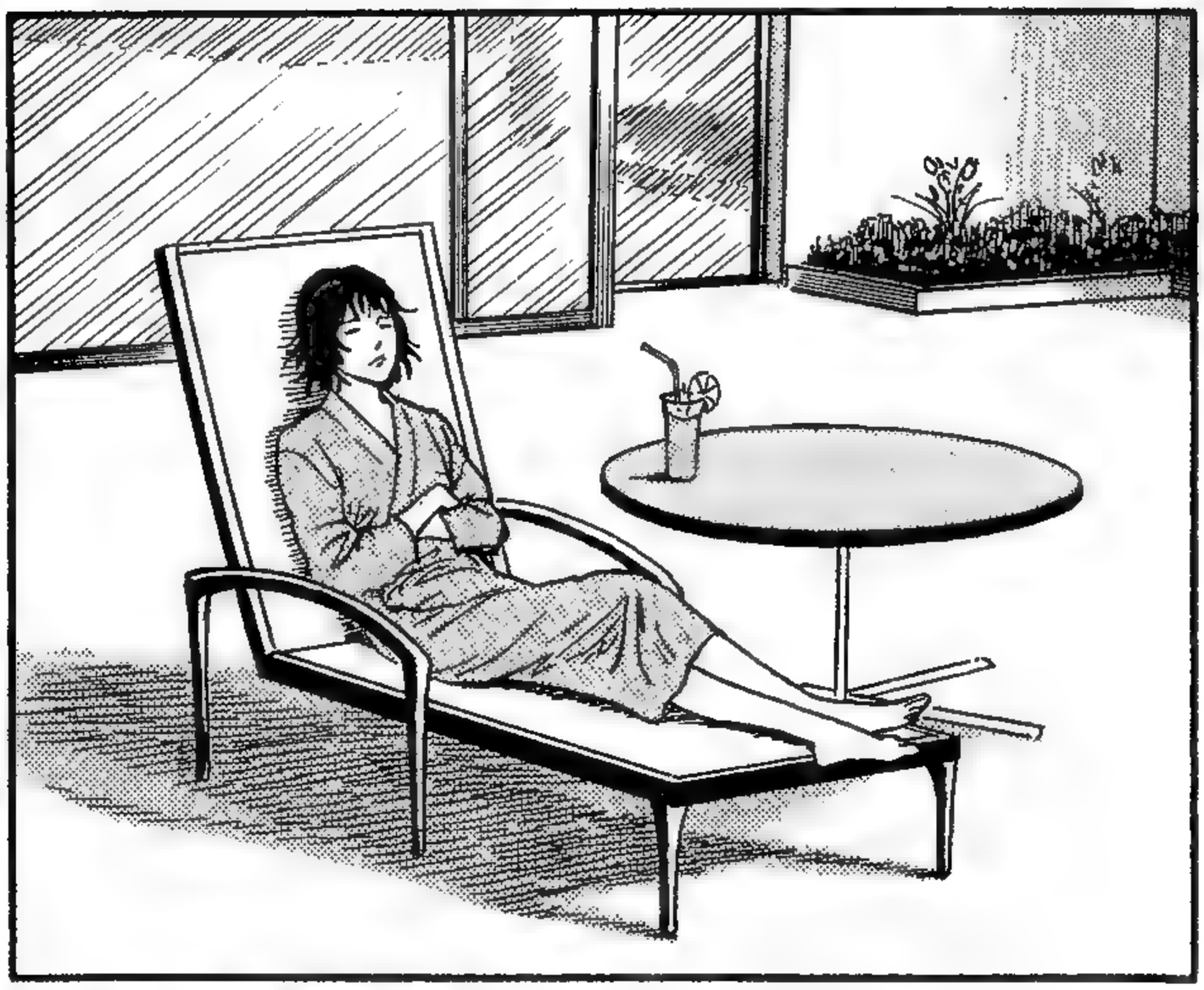
KREE

DOPPEL-
GÄNGER.

BEEN A
WHILE
SINCE I'VE
SEEN YOU.

PSH PSH PSH PSH

PSH PSH PSH



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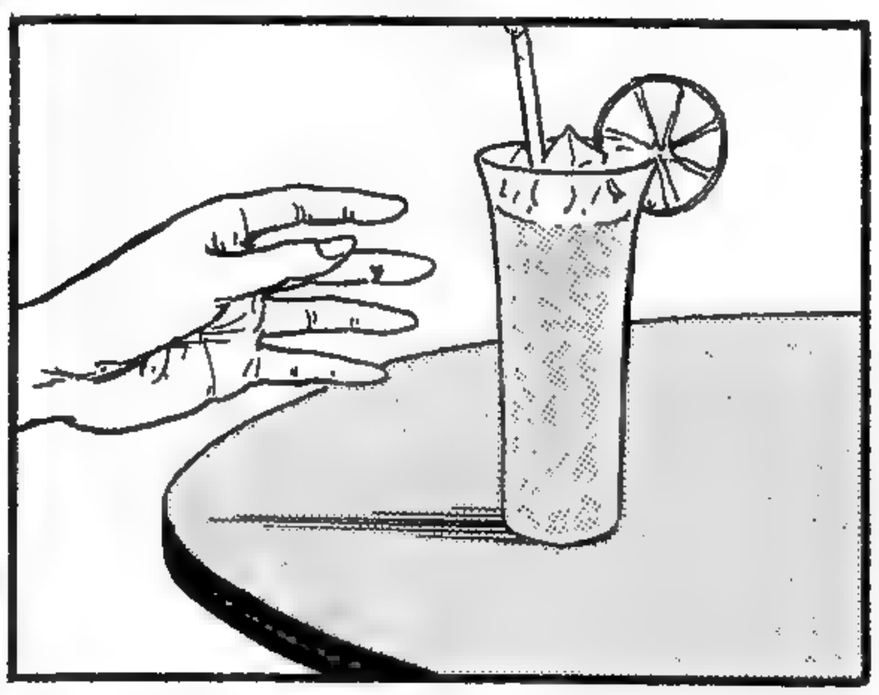
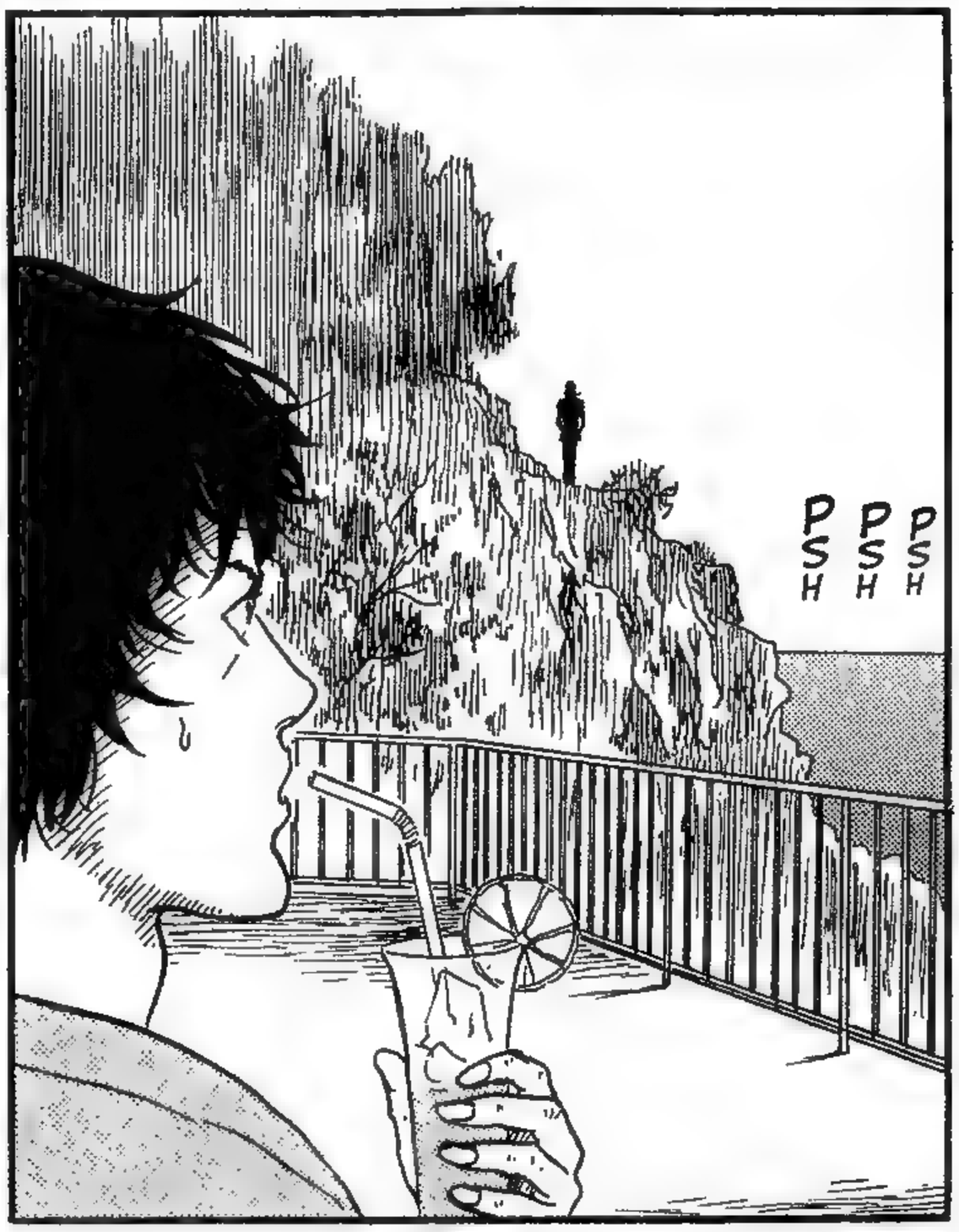
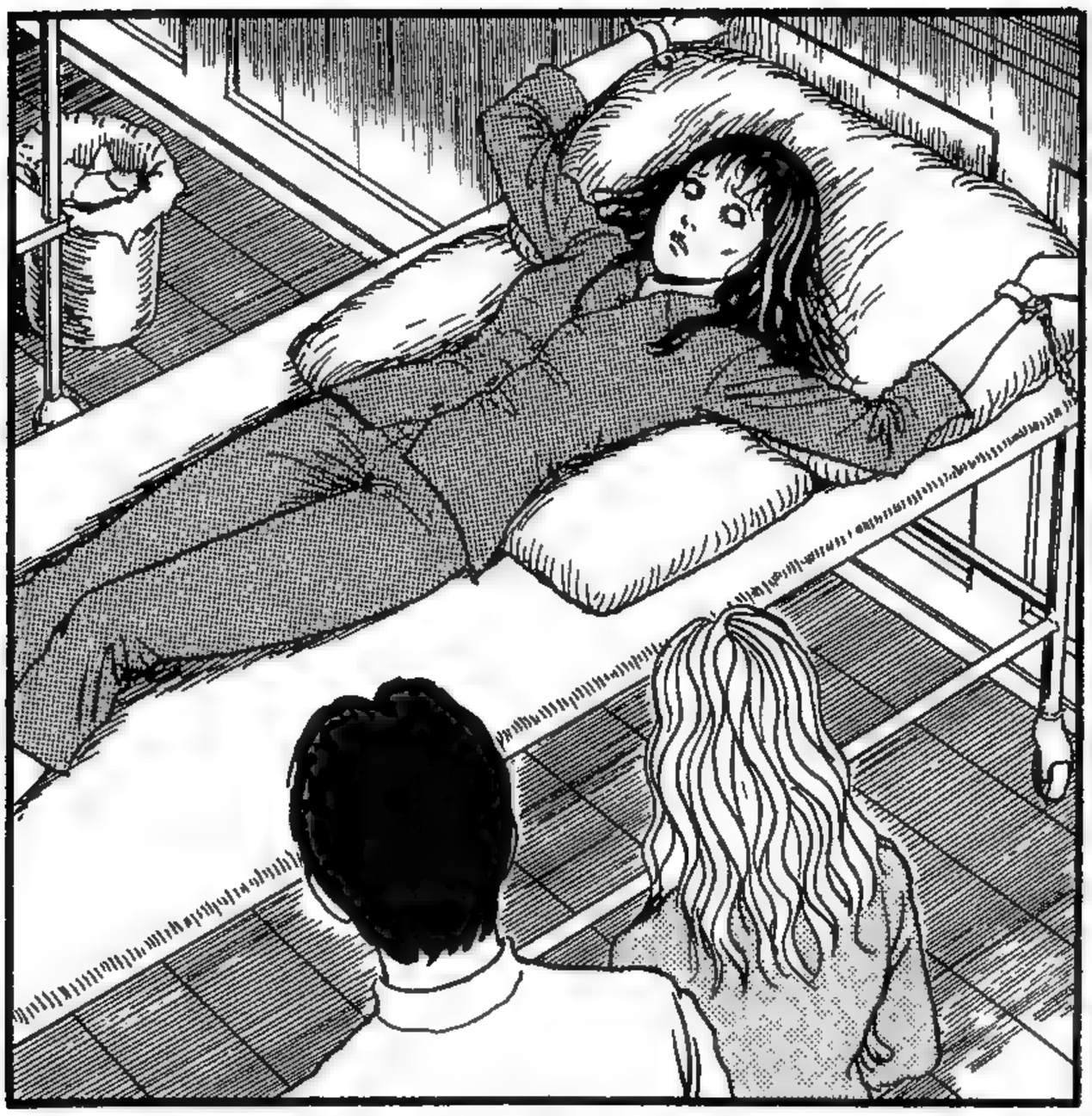
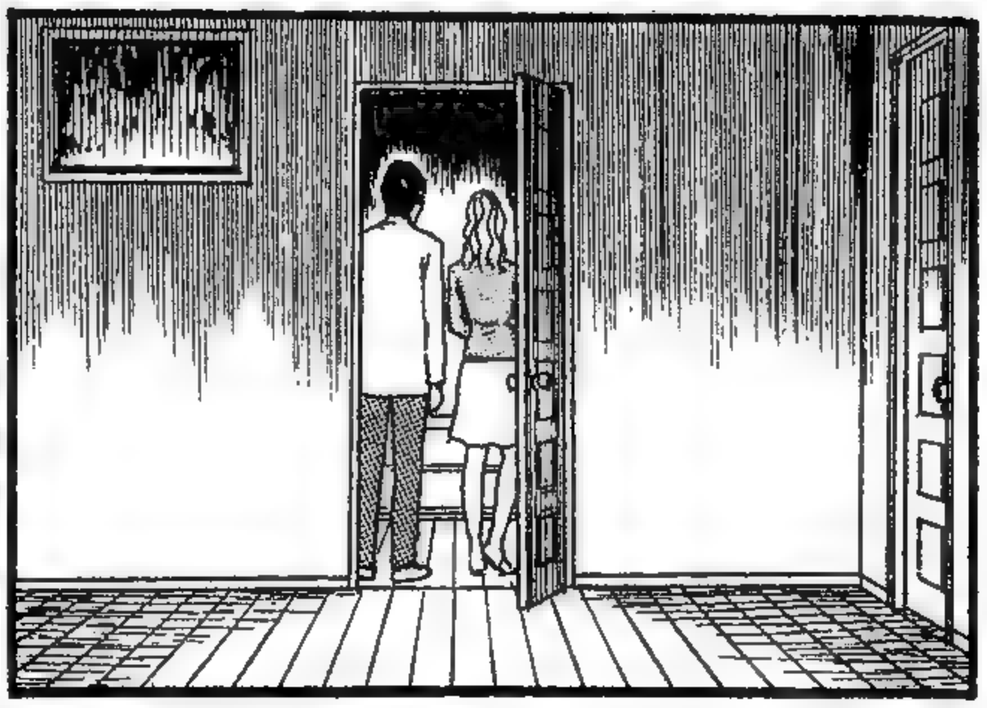
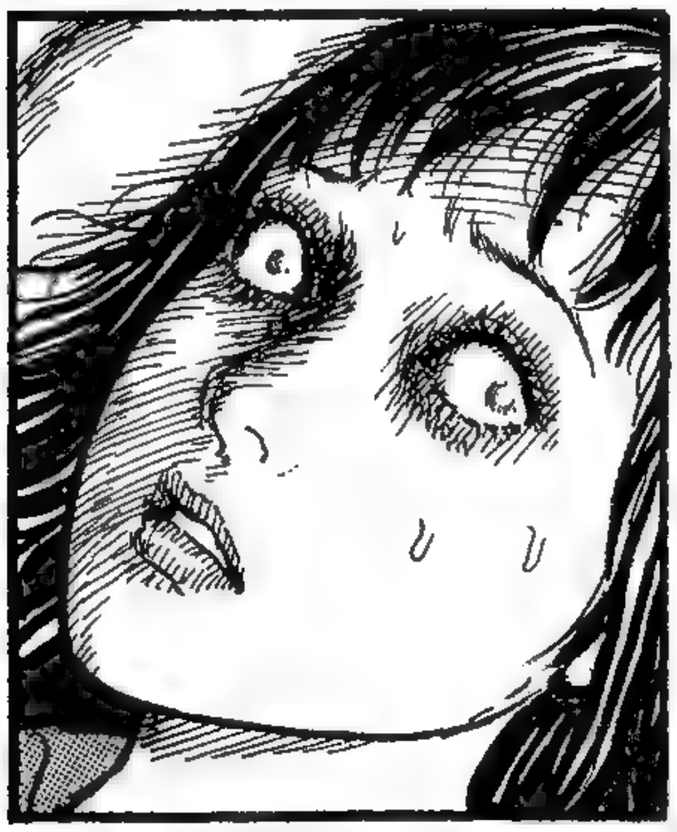



PSH
PSH
PSH

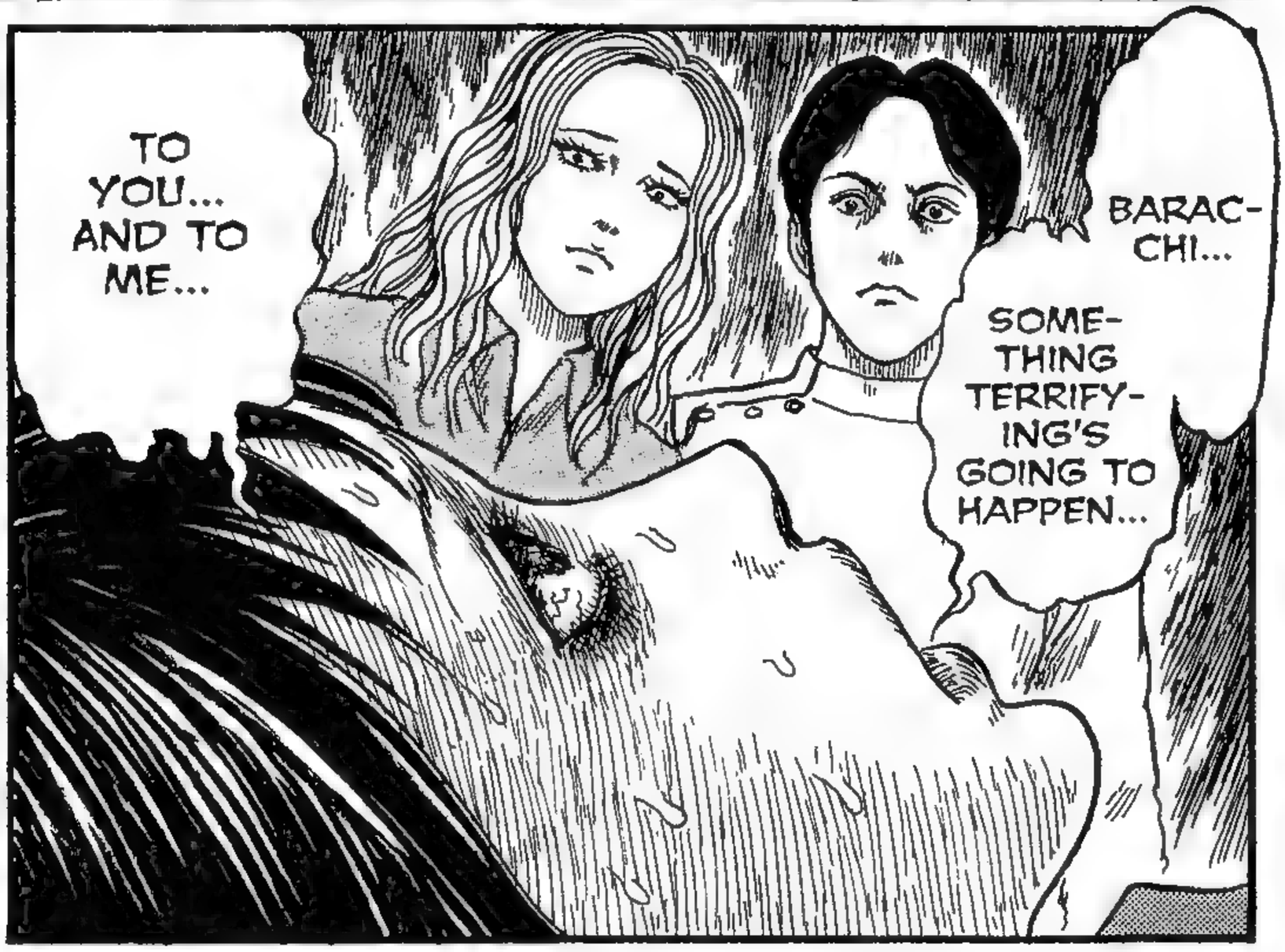
DAMMIT! THERE HE IS AGAIN.






HEE HEE HEE!
HEE ...

HE AND I ARE IN LOVE. WE'RE GETTING MARRIED.
MARUSO, THE DOCTOR DOESN'T LOVE YOU ANYMORE.


TO YOU... AND TO ME...
BARAC-CHI... SOME-THING TERRIFY-ING'S GOING TO HAPPEN...

BARACCHI, THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO SHOW YOU.

WHAT?

DOCTOR, IS IT IN THE BASEMENT POOL?

KACHAK

NOT HERE. IN THE ROOM BACK THERE.

I DIDN'T TELL YOU. BUT THE "GATE" IS VALUABLE.

I CULTIVATED YOUR BIRTHMARK.

THIS...

D-DOCTOR ...

SO YOU REALLY DID CULTIVATE IT.

B-BUT I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS.

YOU DO AWFUL THINGS, DOCTOR.

IT'S AWFUL.

HE SAID THIS WAS YOUR GATE, SO I SHOULD ASK YOU.

I ASKED PII-TAN TO GO TO THE SPIRIT WORLD THROUGH THIS GATE THE OTHER DAY, BUT HE REFUSED.

LOOK. A GOOD GATE HAS OPENED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BIRTHMARK.

...

AND THAT THERE'S ANOTHER WORLD INSIDE OF IT...

...FILLED WITH PARADONITE. SUCH NONSENSE IS SIMPLY IMPOSSIBLE TO BELIEVE!

THE DOCTOR SAYS THIS IS A HUMAN STOMACH.

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR COMING TODAY.

BE CAREFUL NOT TO STEP ON ANY, MINISTER.

BUT THERE *IS* PARADONITE EVERYWHERE IN THIS COTTAGE.

HE'S A ROBOT.

ALLOW ME TO FIRST INTRODUCE PII-TAN.

MURMUR MURMUR

A ROBOT ?!

...OF OUR COUNTRY HERE.

IT IS AN HONOR TO HAVE REPRE-SENTATIVES...

THESE TWO ARE THE KEY TO THIS PROJECT.

AND THIS IS BARA HIRATANI, KNOWN AS BARACCHI.

I SEE.

IT WAS MODELED AFTER THE OWNER OF THIS GIANT STOMACH.

FIRST, PII-TAN.

NOW I'D ASK THAT YOU PLEASE LOOK AT OUR RESULTS.

THIS BEAUTIFUL WOMAN?!

OH!

WHEN HE CAME OUT WITH A LARGE AMOUNT OF PARADONITE TEN MINUTES LATER, IT WAS ANALYZED ON THE SPOT.

THERE'S NO MISTAKE. IT'S REAL.

THE VIPS WATCHED AS PII-TAN WENT INTO THE MASSIVE STOMACH.

THERE MUST BE SOME KIND OF GIMMICK INSIDE OF THE STOMACH?

I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THIS, THOUGH. SPIRIT WORLD, PARALLEL WORLD.

IF YOU'LL COME INTO THE OTHER ROOM WHERE HER "GATE" IS.

NOW THEN, GENTLEMEN, NEXT UP IS THE BEAUTIFUL BARA.

...TO THIS OTHER WORLD OUR-SELVES.

TRUE. IT'S NOT AS IF WE SAW THE GATE...

THIS IS JUST AS DISGUST-ING.

OH!

TAK

HEE HEE HEE HEE

I'LL RETURN IN A MOMENT, GENTLEMEN.

TIMP

HYOO

RIGHT NOW, SHE IS FLYING FREELY THROUGH THAT DAZZLING SPACE AND COLLECTING PARADONITE.

KLAK KLAK

WHAT YOU CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF THROUGH THIS GATE IS THE OTHER WORLD.

AH! WHAT WAS THAT?!

OOH!

SHE IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN DIVE THROUGH THAT GATE AND RETURN SAFELY.

THE TRUTH IS, THIS TISSUE IS FROM HER BODY.

SHE SHOULD BE RETURNING SOON.

IT'S TAKING QUITE A WHILE THIS TIME.

THIRTY MINUTES LATER...

WHP

PLAP

KKKK

PLAP

PLAP

AAAAH!

TOAD
BWURP

KUNK

KUNK

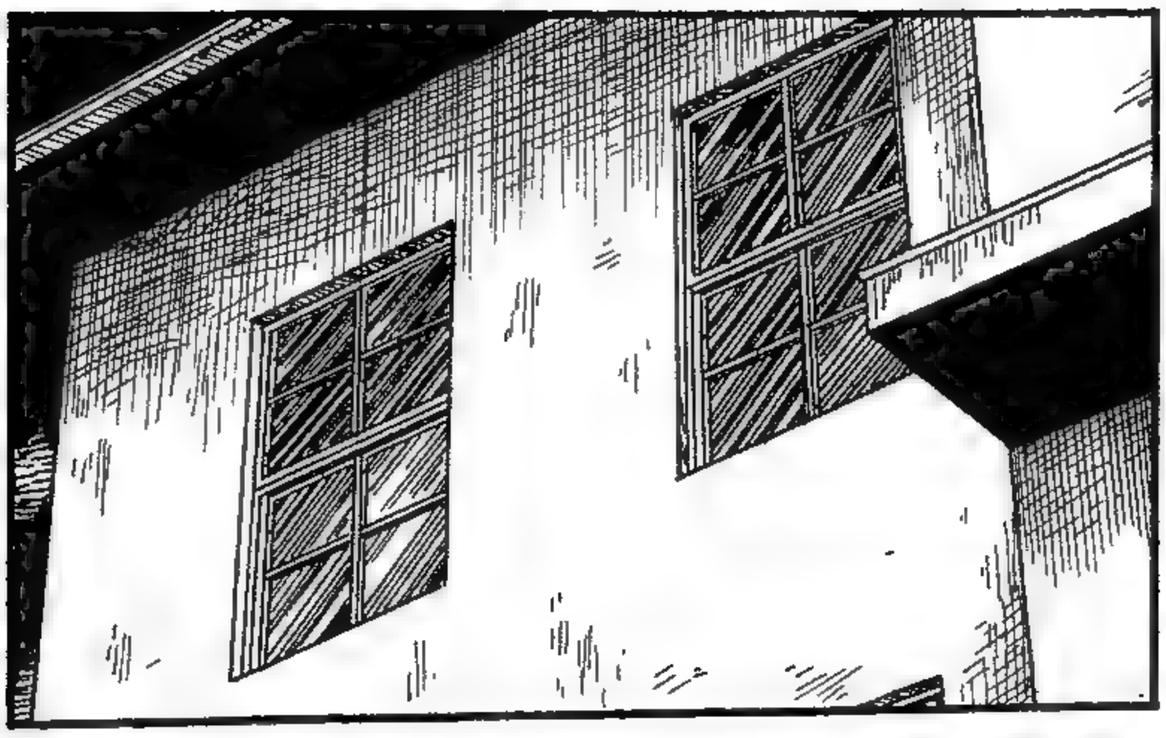
AAAAAH!

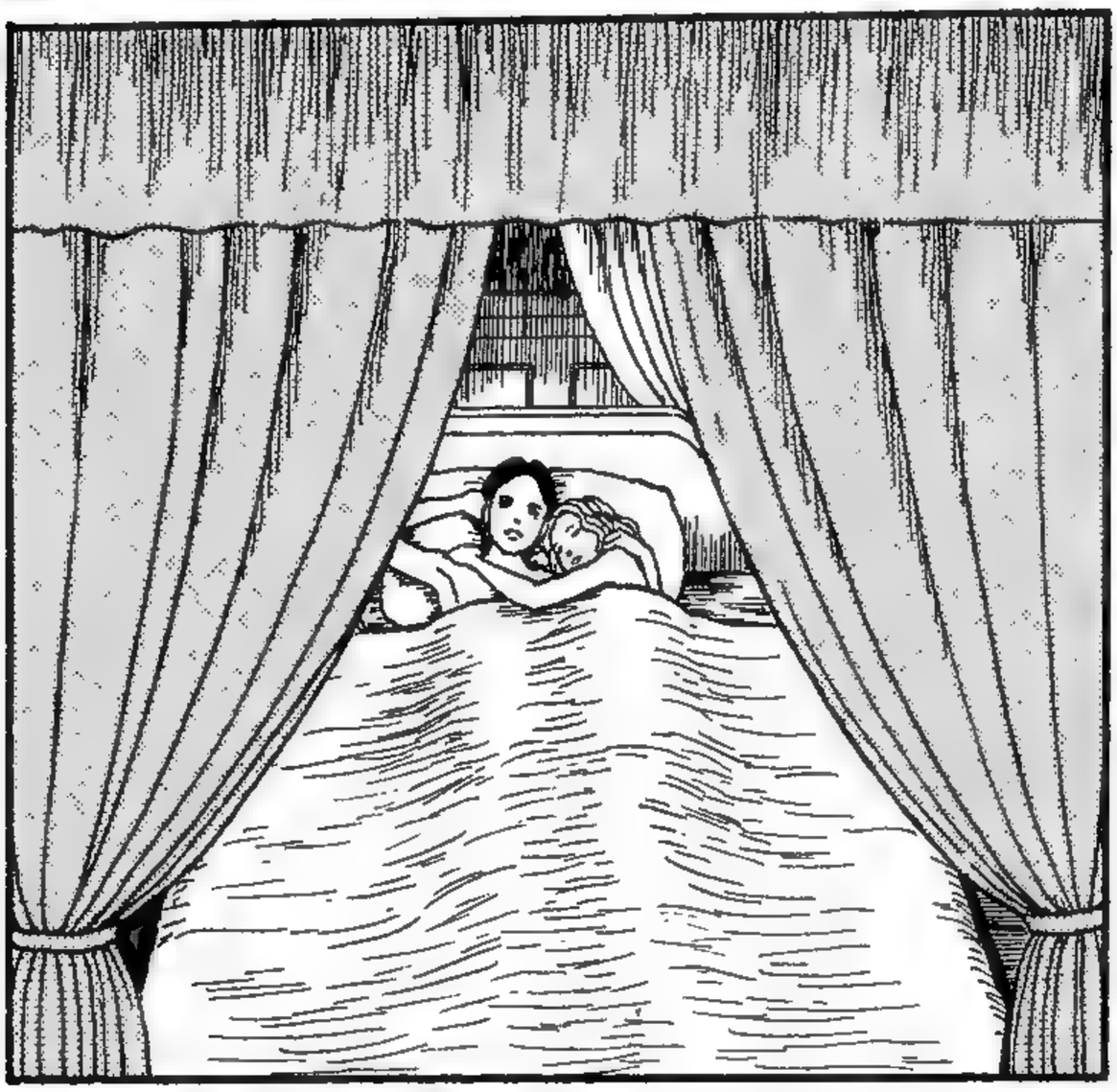
WHAT ON EARTH IS THIS?!

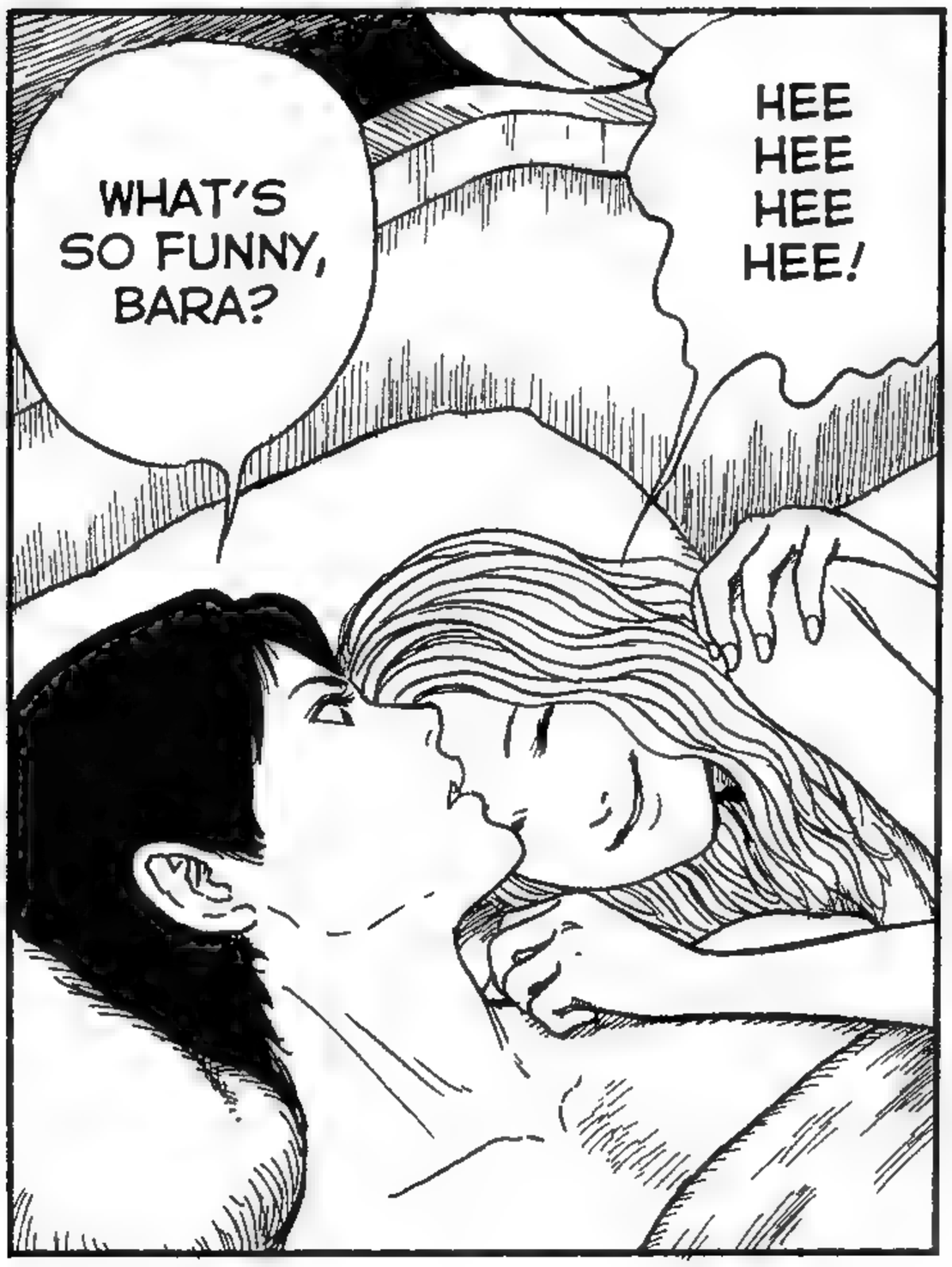
DOCTOR SUGA!

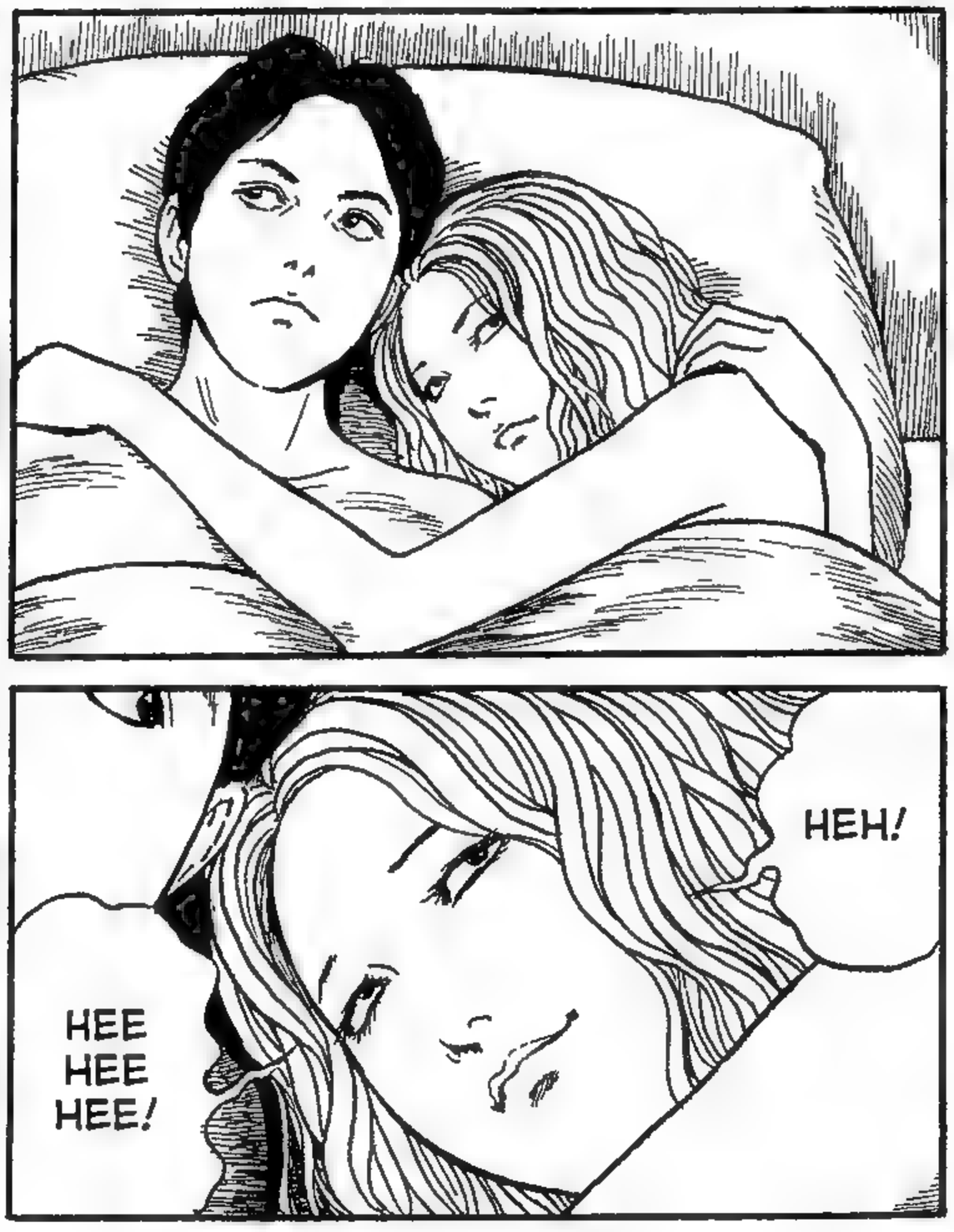
Final Chapter

TOWARD A DAZZLING FUTURE






WHAT'S SO FUNNY, BARA?
HEE HEE HEE HEE!


HEH!
HEE HEE HEE!

IT WAS A DETAILED ROBOT PERFECTLY PATTERNED AFTER YOU.

YOU DID INDEED LITERALLY EXPLODE.

VIPS FROM EVERY FIELD IN THE COUNTRY, AND I EXPLODE AT EXACTLY THE WRONG MOMENT.

IT'S JUST, THAT TOP SECRET INVITATION-ONLY MEETING WAS A DISASTER.

I JUST HAD THIS THOUGHT.

BARA?

A TOTAL HEAP OF JUNK. HA HA HA HA!

I WONDER WHY. I ORDERED IT FROM THE UNIVERSITY THAT MADE PII-TAN, AND IT WAS EVEN MORE EXQUISITE THAN PII-TAN.

WHAT YOU CALL THE OTHER WORLD IS PROBABLY THE *OTHER SIDE*. NO THANKS!

I MIGHT BE THE OWNER OF THE "GATE," BUT I'M A FLESH-AND-BLOOD HUMAN BEING. I'M NOT LIKE THAT ROBOT PII-TAN!

...THROUGH THE GATE TO THE OTHER WORLD?

WHAT IF YOU DOVE...

YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS.

SLAM

KREEEE

I'M SCARED ...

AAH...

MARUSO.

YOU KNOW, MARUSO, CONTRARY TO THIS ANXIETY OF YOURS...

...A DAZZLING FUTURE AWAITS HUMANITY.

WHERE ON EARTH IS IT COMING FROM?

POOR THING. YOU'RE STILL TORTURED BY ANXIETY FOR NO REASON, *HM?*

...IS A REVOLU-TIONARY ENERGY SOURCE.

THE PARADONITE THAT PII-TAN COLLECTS THROUGH THE GATE EACH DAY...

NATURALLY, IT'S ALL TOP SECRET. WHAT WE'RE SLOWLY LEARNING IS...

A NUMBER OF SCIENTISTS ARE CURRENTLY RESEARCHING THE POSSIBILITIES OF PARADONITE UNDER NATIONAL SUPERVISION.

AND NOW THERE ARE TWO GATES, PII-TAN'S STOMACH AND BARACCHI'S BIRTHMARK.

BUT THAT'S SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH. MY HUNCH IS THAT THERE ARE TWO MORE.

...WILL LIKELY BRING SALVATION TO HUMANITY.

...PARA-DONITE'S ENERGY...

I HAVE NO PARTICULAR EVIDENCE OF THIS. IT'S JUST A HUNCH.

I VERY MUCH SUSPECT YOU AND TABURO ALSO HAVE GATES.

SO I'D LIKE TO EXAMINE YOU THOROUGHLY. I'LL TAKE YOU TO A HOSPITAL IN THE CITY SOON.

I'VE REALLY PUT YOU THROUGH IT, *HM?*

I LOVE YOU.

MARU-SO.

KACHAK

BARA...

WAIT!

BARAC-CHI!

WHERE ARE YOU GOING ?!

BARACCHI! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

THAT'S KEROSENE!

OKAY

SPLISH SPLISH

SHF

TUNK

WELL, I'M DONE. I'LL BURN THIS THING UP!

HOW DARE YOU MAKE A FOOL OF ME!

STAY AWAY FROM ME!

NO! YOU'RE THE ONE I LOVE!

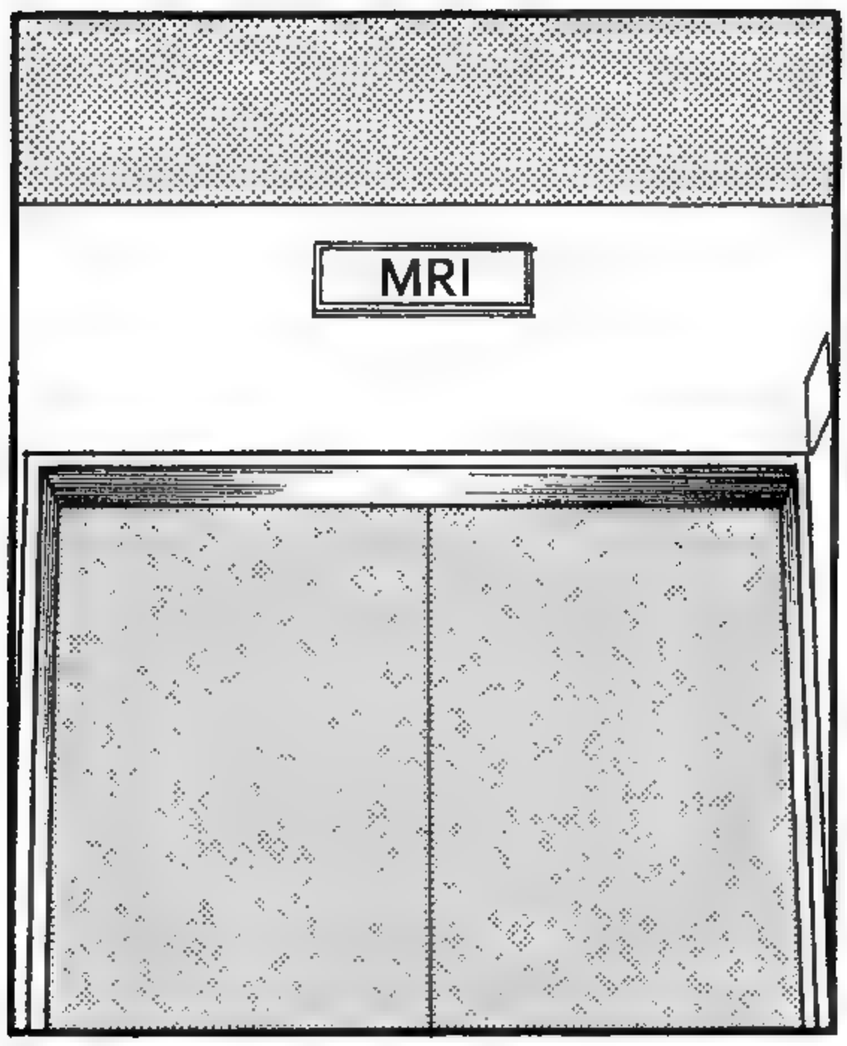
WHAT DON'T I UNDERSTAND?! YOU'VE BEEN MEETING HER IN SECRET ALL THIS TIME!

STOP! YOU DON'T UNDER-STAND!

SHOVE

HAAH ...

HAAH ...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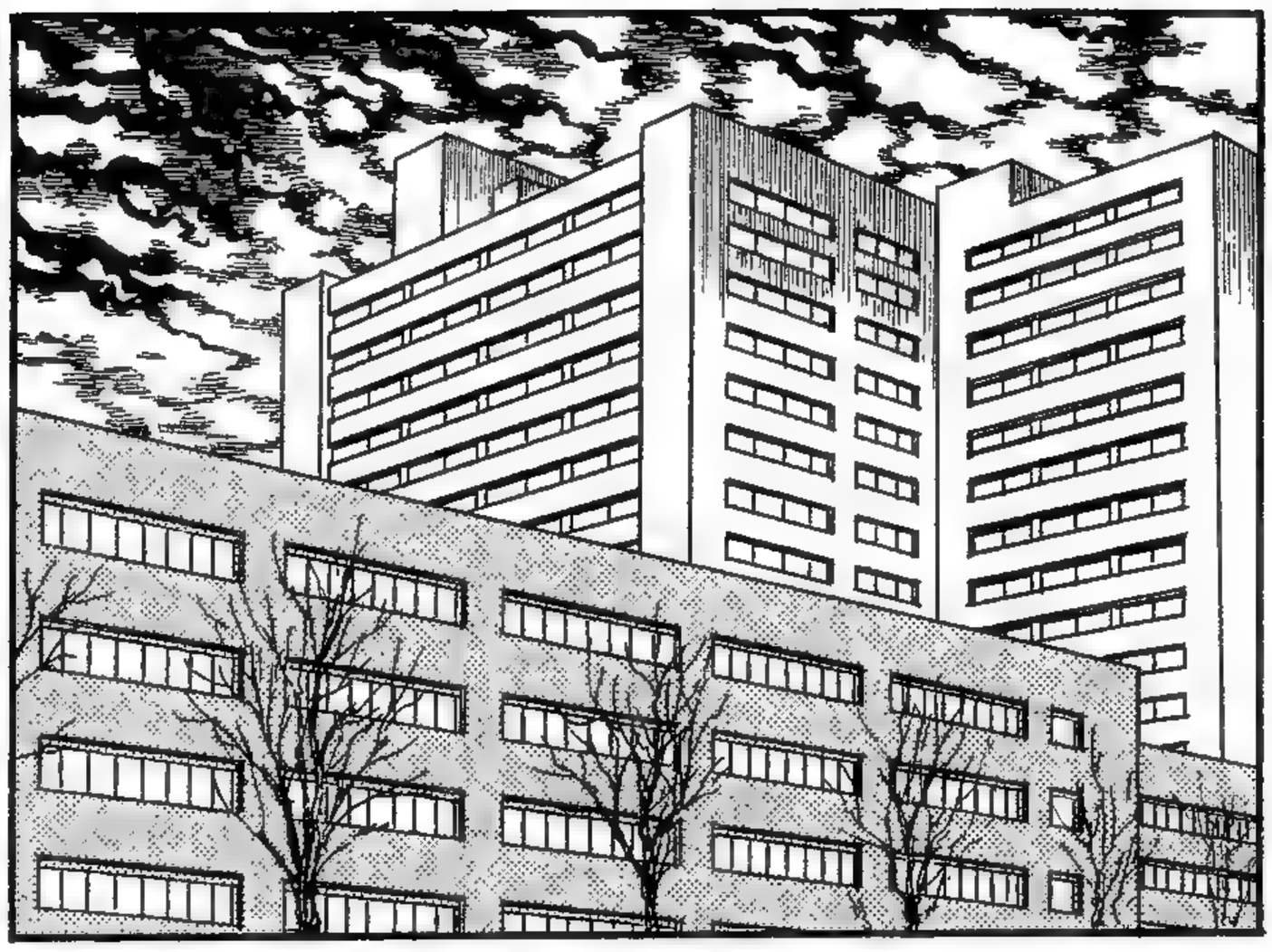

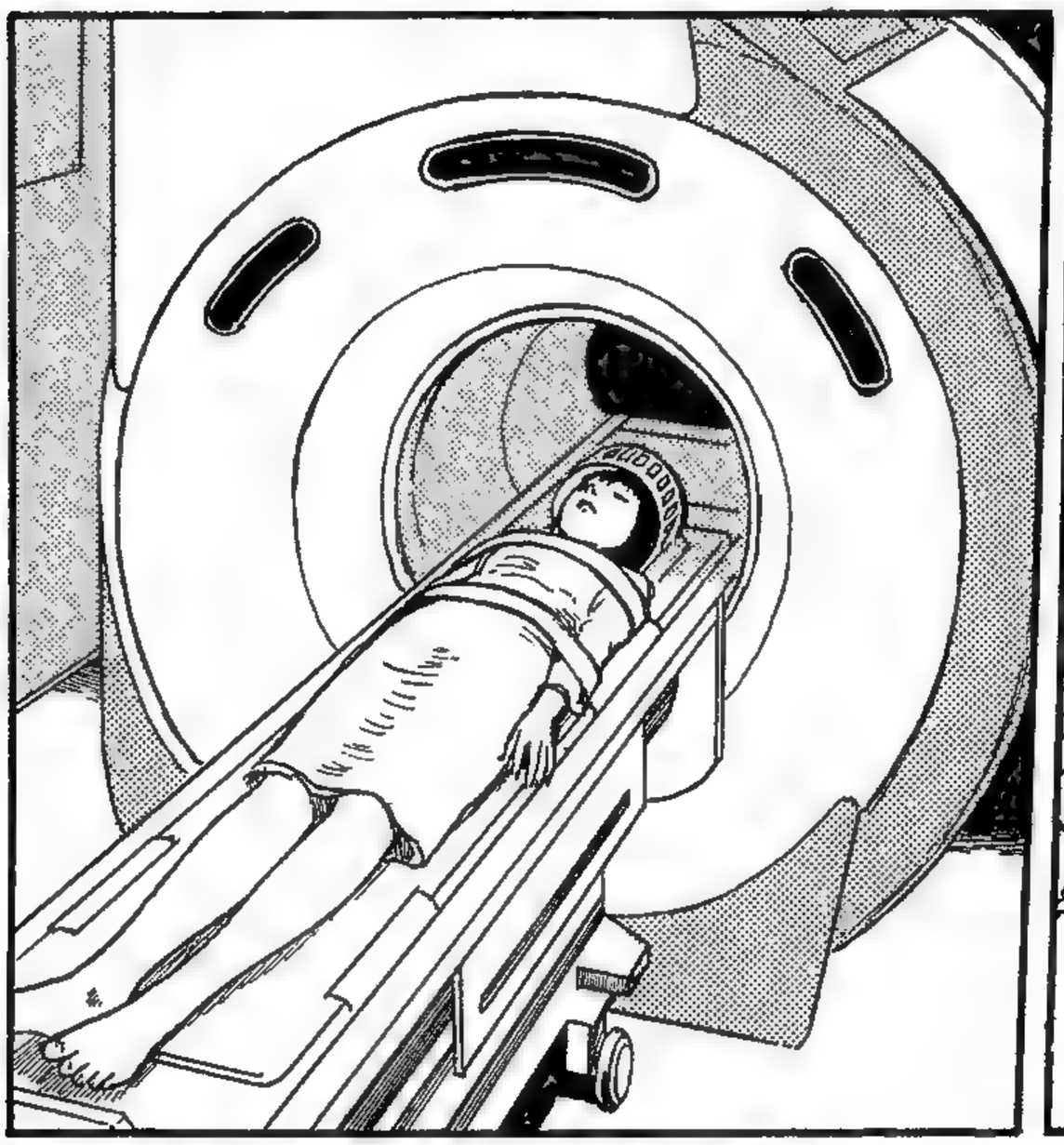

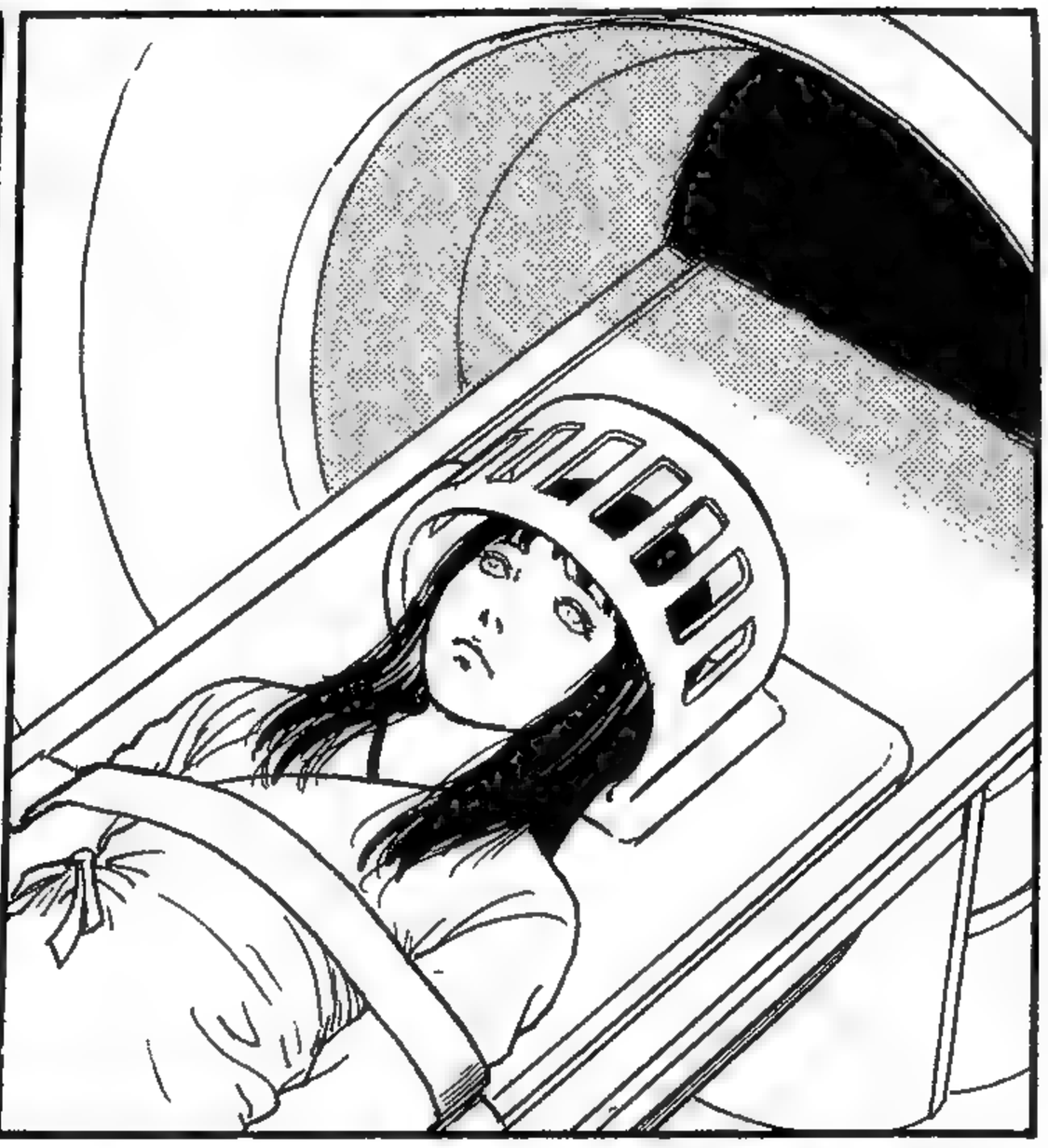

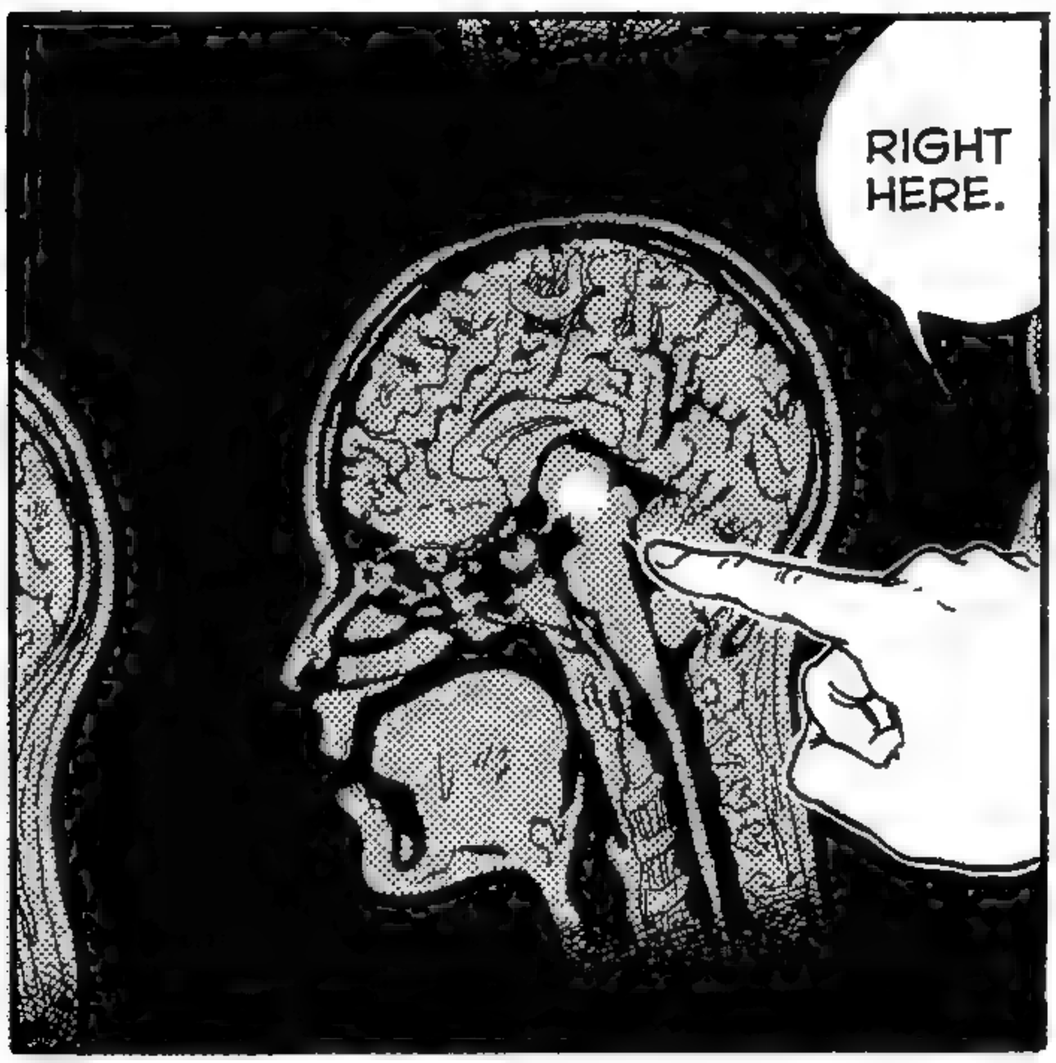
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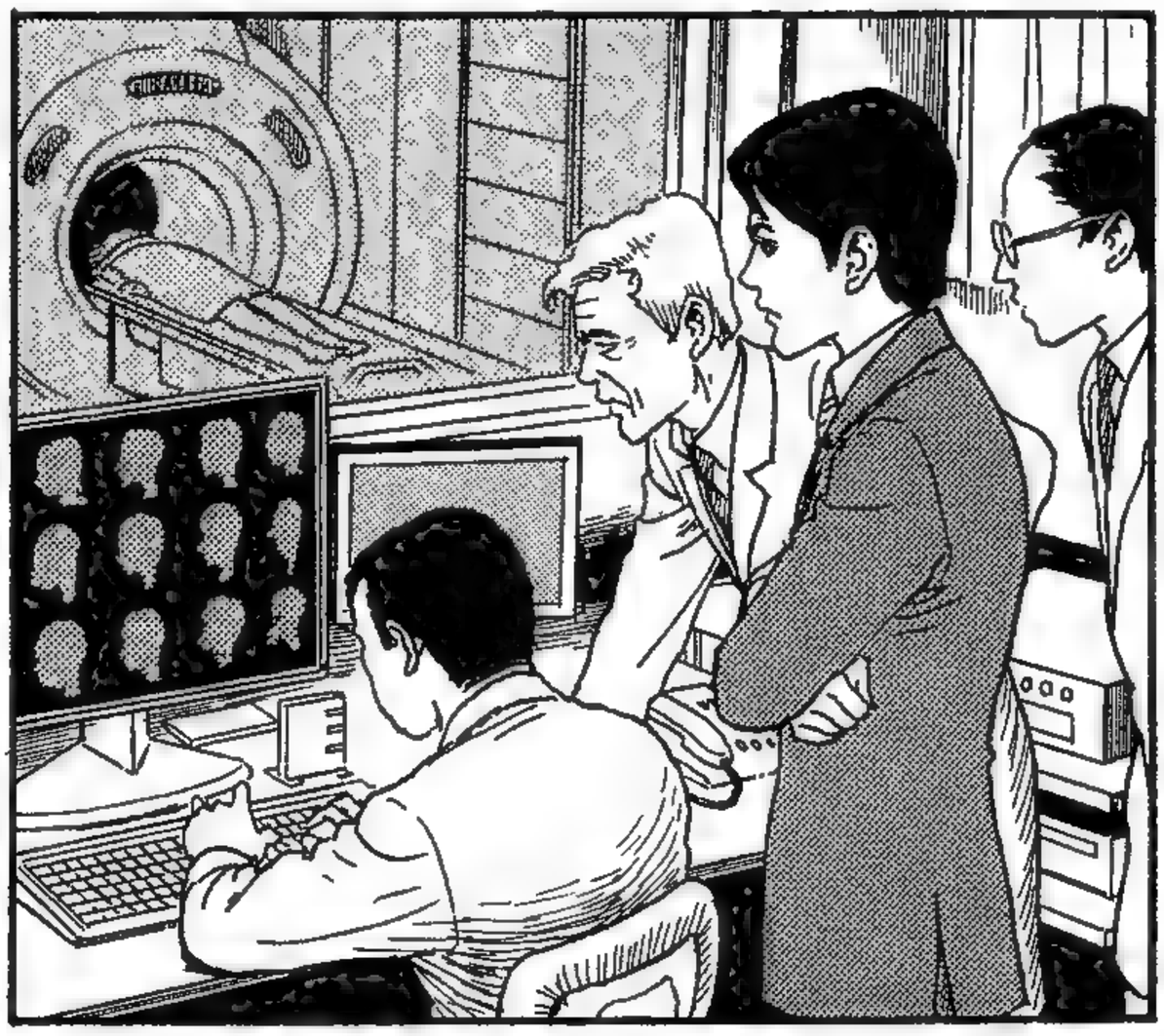


IT WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT, BUT WE'LL TRY.

CAN IT BE REMOVED?

A TUMOR.

OH!

IT'S QUITE LARGE.

IN THE CENTER OF THE BRAIN STEM. THERE'S A TUMOR NEAR THE AMYGDALA, DOCTOR SUGA.

IT'S A POSSIBILITY AT BEST.

NOW THEN, DOCTOR SUGA, YOU SAY THIS TUMOR IS A "GATE" TO ANOTHER WORLD—TO PARADISE?

IF SHE DIDN'T RETURN ALIVE, THEN THIS IS A PAINFUL BLOW FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARADONITE.

SHE DOVE THROUGH HER GATE FOR THE SAKE OF HUMANITY, BUT NEVER RETURNED.

IF IT IS, THEN THAT WILL BE THE THIRD GATE.

WHAT ABOUT THE OWNER OF THE SECOND GATE, BARA HIRATANI?

THEY'LL SOON PRODUCE A PARADONITE MINING MACHINE THAT CAN WITHSTAND THE HARSH ENVIRONMENT OF PARADISE.

IT IS. BUT THE SPACE AGENCY TEAM HAS BEEN DEVELOPING A SPECIAL PROBE IN EXTREME SECRECY.

YOU'RE CLEAR.

GOOD.

KEEP GOING.

CREAK CREAK CREAK CREAK CREAK

OH! IS THAT A VEIN OF PARADONITE ?!

SO THIS IS THE LIGHT OF PARADISE.

THERE ARE NO OBSTA-CLES AT PRESENT.

BUT THE CAMERA'S STILL WORKING. LET'S WAIT AND SEE FOR A BIT.

HMM. THIS IS A PROBLEM.

THE ARM'S NOT RESPOND-ING.

SIR, WE HAVE AN ABNORMAL SIGNAL!

A-6

WHAT'S THAT?

THAT BLACK SPOT...

SNAP

AH!

REEL IT IN NOW!

TWNG

AH! THE CAMERA BROKE, TOO!

I CAN'T! THE PROBE'S NON-OPERATIONAL!

YOU! FOLLOW THAT OBJECT WITH THE CAMERA!

SHFFFF

AH!

CREAK CREAK

CREAK CREAK

AND THIS PROBE WAS BUILT WITH EVERYTHING SCIENCE HAS TO OFFER.

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE ENVIRON-MENT OF PARADISE LIKE?

TH-THIS...

IT WAS DESTROYED BY PARADISE'S ATMO-SPHERE.

BEEP

BEEP

WAS THAT BARA?

THAT SHADOW SHOWN FOR AN INSTANT ON THE MONITOR...

MOVE IT OUT, SLOWLY.

KRRRRR

KRRRRR

MY EYES PLAYING TRICKS, THAT'S ALL.

NO.

?

KRRRRRRRRR

WHAT'S THAT SOUND?

WHAT?

STAY AWAY FROM ME!

BUMP

BARA
...

CONGRATU-
LATIONS.

...

BARAC-
CHI...

...

YOU'RE
SPIRIT
WORLD
FLYER
NO. 2.

SHAAAAAA

KACHA

CAN I HELP YOU?

DING DONG

DING DONG

I'M MR. KOROSE'S PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN.

THIS IS THE HOME OF TADASHI KUROSE, YES? MY NAME IS SUGA.

IS HE AT HOME?

PLEASE. COME IN.

HAS HE FALLEN ILL?

HE'S BEEN HIDING IN HIS ROOM RECENTLY.

I'M HIS HIRED MAN. I TAKE CARE OF ALL SORTS OF THINGS FOR MR. KUROSE.

MR. KUROSE SAID THAT ANOTHER "HIM" WAS AFTER HIM. DELIRIOUS RANTINGS.

NO. I DON'T THINK IT'S ANYTHING LIKE THAT.

RECENTLY, HE'S BEEN SAYING TRULY INCOMPRE-HENSIBLE THINGS.

AND THEN HE BEGAN TO STAY IN HIS ROOM IN THE DARK.

SUCH AS?

AFTER A WHILE...

...HE STARTED TO FEAR HIS OWN SHADOW.

...
GLOWS
?

HIS
SHAD-
OW...

HE SAYS...
HIS
SHADOW
GLOWS IN
THE DARK.

PLEASE
DO.
YOU'RE
HIS
PHYSICIAN.

MAY
I GO
INSIDE?

I'VE CALLED
TO HIM
SEVERAL
TIMES SINCE
MORNING,
BUT HE
HASN'T
RESPONDED.

THIS
IS HIS
ROOM.

KACHAK

TABURO.

IT'S ME. SUGA.

AH!

THIS SILHOUETTE'S TABURO.

THIS...

A SHINING SHADOW?!

HM?

WHERE IS HE?!

BUT...

...ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS SILHOUETTE.

THIS DAZZLING LIGHT...

AH!

IT'S PARA-DISE!

…

TABURO
...

...

DOES YOUR SHADOW OFTEN GLOW?

THE SHADOW!

...COME BACK TO MY COTTAGE? YOUR FRIENDS ARE WAITING FOR YOU.

WOULD YOU...

HOW DO YOU FEEL, MARUSO?

THE OPERATION WAS A SUCCESS.

YOUR PROGNOSIS IS GOOD.

I FEEL VERY GOOD.

GOOD.

I DON'T KNOW.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THAT ANXIETY?

IT'S CURIOUS. EVER SINCE THE SURGERY, YOU'VE BEEN SO AT PEACE, LIKE YOU'RE FREE OF WHAT WAS HAUNTING YOU.

MARUSO. I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT SOME-THING.

I SEE. AT ANY RATE, IT'S A POSITIVE THING.

...ON THE PART OF THE BRAIN THAT FEELS EMOTION— ANXIETY.

DOCTOR SUGA, IT MIGHT BE THAT THE SURGERY HAD SOME EFFECT...

IT WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO BE THAT YOU'RE CULTIVATING MY TUMOR IN THE BASEMENT?

THIS SOME-THING...

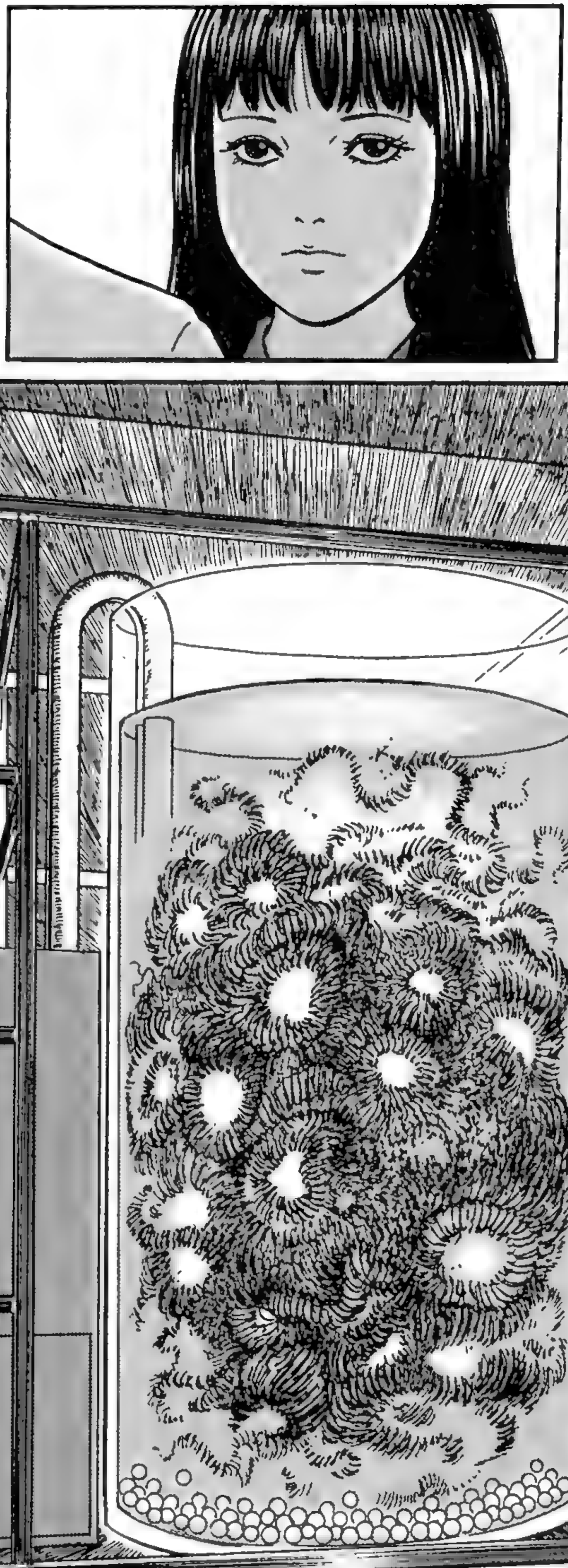
DOCTOR SUGA.

NOR ME. THAT'S TOP SECRET.

NO, NOT ME.

DID SOMEONE TELL HER?

WHAT ?



KRUU

FINE. I WILL.

AND THEN COME BACK. FOR THE SAKE OF HUMANITY?

DOCTOR SUGA. I SUPPOSE YOU WANT ME TO GO TO PARADISE?

THE OLD ME...WHY WAS I SO FRIGHTENED ?

STRANGE, ISN'T IT? I'M NOT AFRAID AT ALL.

...

YOU'RE NOT AFRAID?

BUT, DOCTOR ...

...FOR THE SAKE OF HUMANITY.

I DO WONDER IF THIS IS REALLY...

PERFECT! IT'S SETTLED. ALL OF YOU ARE READY TO GO NOW!

IT DOES SEEM LIKE THE SURGERY HAD SOME EFFECT ON YOUR EMOTIONS THEN.

SPLRRT

...AND THE DISTURBING SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENON THAT CAME WITH IT — CAUSED A SENSATION.

PARA-DONITE'S EXPLOSIVE ENERGY...

AND NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF ITS BEAUTY.

THE WHOLE WORLD HAD PARA-DONITE FEVER.

...HAD THEIR IDENTITIES QUIETLY ERASED.

THE MAN AND WOMAN WHO HAD INITIALLY BEEN UNDER SUCH SCRUTINY ON SUSPICION OF TERRORISM...

OPEN

SALE

SON

RECENTLY, HOWEVER, PARADONITE HAS RAPIDLY DISAPPEARED FROM THE MARKET.

IT HAS BEEN PLACED UNDER THE STRICT CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT.

...WERE BRINGING PARADONITE FROM THE SPIRIT WORLD INTO THIS ONE.

...THAT AT A SECRET BASE IN THE MOUNTAINS, FOUR PEOPLE KNOWN AS BLACK PARADOX...

BUT A STRANGE RUMOR PERSISTED ...

...LIKE THIS.

BUT I NEVER DREAMED THAT WE WOULD GO BACK AND FORTH...

...HAVE GONE OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE, JUST LIKE WE WANTED.

AT LONG LAST, THE FOUR OF US...

...

YES.

...YOU CAN SEE THE FUTURE NOW?

MARUSO? YOU SAID...

...BECAME SOMETHING I COULD SEE AS A CLEAR VISION OF THE FUTURE.

AFTER THE BRAIN SURGERY, THAT VAGUE, TERRIFYING "SENSE" THAT I HAD...

...I SEE PEOPLE DISAPPEARING ONE AFTER THE OTHER IN THIS WORLD.

BUT IN THAT SHADOW...

I CAN SEE IT.

HUMANITY WILL PROGRESS BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS THANKS TO THE FUTURE PARADONITE ENERGY REVOLUTION.

...DISAP-PEAR?

PEOPLE ...

WHAT'S THAT MEAN?

THEIR OWN SOULS?

THE PARADONITE THAT HUMANITY IS USING AS AN ENERGY SOURCE...

...IS ACTUALLY THEIR OWN SOULS.

...IS LIKE HUMANITY GOING OUT TO HUNT THEIR OWN SOULS.

SO THE PARADONITE PLAN...

THE SOULS OF LIVING CREATURES ARE ALWAYS IN EXISTENCE IN THE SPIRIT WORLD.

OUR BODIES LIVE AND DIE ON EARTH, BUT OUR TRUE FORMS—OUR SPIRITS—ARE A CONSTANT IN THE SPIRIT WORLD.

AND NOW THAT WE KNOW THIS, WE CAN STOP BRINGING THE STONES OVER. IF WE DON'T TAKE THEM, THEY WON'T DISAPPEAR. THAT FUTURE WON'T HAPPEN.

BUT THEN ISN'T THERE A RISK OF OUR OWN SOULS DISAPPEAR-ING?

I WONDER IF THAT'S TRUE.

...

FOR REAL?!

WHAT? HE'S MAKING ANOTHER GATE BESIDES OURS?

...WHAT IF DOCTOR SUGA SUCCEEDS IN PRODUCING ANOTHER GATE?

EVEN IF *WE* DON'T TAKE THEM...

...HUMANITY WILL GO EXTINCT ?

SO THEN ...

I SUPPOSE NOT. ASSUMING HUMANITY CAN GIVE UP THE BLESSINGS OF PARADONITE.

BUT HUMANITY ISN'T SO FOOLISH AS TO KEEP USING THE STONES WHEN THEY KNOW IT WILL MAKE THEM VANISH.

ARE WE ABLE TO SAVE OUR SOULS IN THE FUTURE?

...

WELL, I'LL LEAVE THAT TO YOUR IMAGINATION. IF YOU DON'T WANT TO DISAPPEAR, YOU'D BETTER HURRY AND FIND YOUR OWN SOULS.

THAT WAS ACTUALLY YOURS. THIS IS THE SOUL OF THE REAL PII-TAN.

THE STONE YOU GOT THE ENERGY FROM AS YOUR DRIVING FORCE.

PII-TAN ALREADY HAS HIS OWN STONE.

I'LL SHARE ONE THING WITH YOU.

WHAT ?!

...BECAUSE MY SOUL WASN'T IN IT?

THE REASON MY ROBOT FAILED WAS...

WHAT? SO THE STONE THAT I HIT WITH A HAMMER WAS—?!

THIS?

OH.

...SOMETHING SPECIAL FROM YOUR OWN SOUL.

YOU SHOULD FEEL...

YES. HOW CAN WE TELL OURS APART?

BUT HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO FIND OUR SOULS? WE DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW MANY SOULS THERE ARE IN THE SPIRIT WORLD.

SO THEN WHAT HAPPENS TO ME AND TABURO?

YOU SOUND ALMOST AS IF YOU'VE FOUND YOURS.

WHAT FATE WILL THAT MAN SUGA ARRIVE AT?

OKAY, HOW ABOUT THIS?

A DISAGREEABLE WOMAN, AS ALWAYS.

I'LL LEAVE THAT TO YOUR IMAGINATION.

MY, MY, WHAT A TRAGIC END.

THAT WILL LATER TURN ON ITS HEAD, AND HE'LL BE DENOUNCED AS THE DOWNFALL OF HUMANITY.

WELL, AT FIRST, THE WORLD WILL MAKE MUCH OF HIM AS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE ENERGY REVOLUTION.

GET OUT THERE AGAIN TODAY! FOR THE SAKE OF HUMANITY.

ALL RIGHT, EVERY-ONE.

KACHAK KACHAK

FOR THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY.

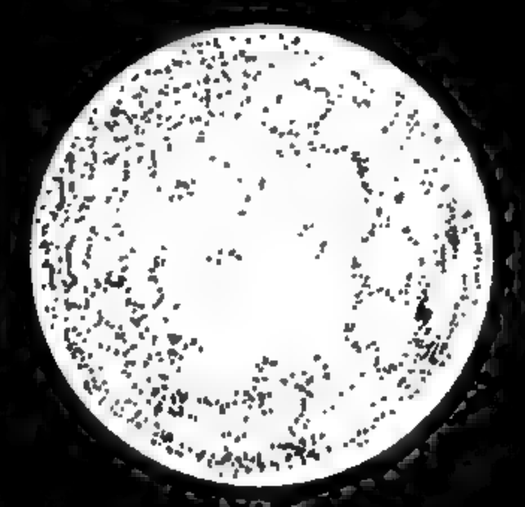
OKAY, LET'S GET GOING.

BLACK PARADOX / END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JUNJI ITO made his professional manga debut in 1987 and since then has gone on to be recognized as one of the greatest contemporary artists working in the horror genre. His titles include *Tomie* and *Uzumaki*, which have been adapted into live-action films; *Gyo*, which was adapted into an animated film; and his books *Deserter*, *Fragments of Horror*, *Frankenstein*, *Lovesickness*, *No Longer Human*, *Remina*, *Sensor*, *Shiver*, *Smashed*, *The Liminal Zone*, and *Venus in the Blind Spot*, all of which are available from VIZ Media.

He is a three-time Eisner Award winner. In 2019 his collection *Frankenstein* won in the "Best Adaptation from Another Medium" category, and in 2021 he was awarded "Best Writer/Artist," while *Remina* received the award for "Best U.S. Edition of International Material (Asia)."



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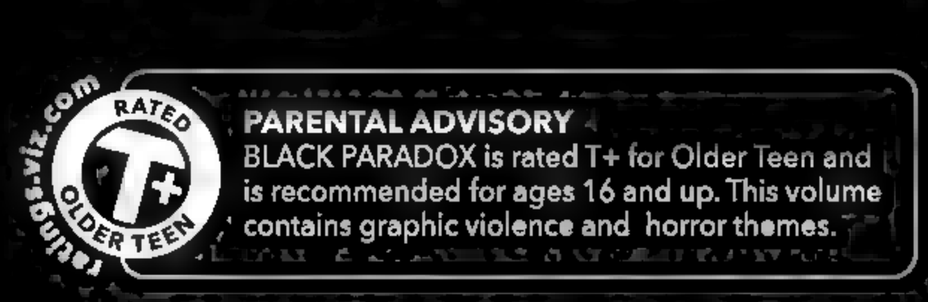
RATED
T+
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PARENTAL ADVISORY
BLACK PARADOX is rated T+ for Older Teen and is recommended for ages 16 and up. This volume contains graphic violence and horror themes.

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Bonus Story

STRANGE PAVILION

JUNJI ITO PRESENTS EXPO 2105 GIFU KAIKI PAVILION

WHAT A GLOOMY WORLD FAIR VENUE.

A REFLECTION OF THESE DARK TIMES, I GUESS.

I'LL BE ABLE TO SEE IT SOON.

AAH, I FINALLY MADE IT INSIDE.

I'VE ALREADY BEEN IN LINE FOR THREE HOURS.

THIS LONG LINE IS FOR THE FAIR'S CROWN JEWEL, THE PAVILION WITH THE EXTINCT CORMORANT BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE WITH THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY.

CORMORANT

THIS IS THE CORMO-RANT ?!

AAAAH!

GRAH

GRAH

IN THE OLD DAYS, PEOPLE USED CORMORANTS TO FISH.

YES.

AMAZ-ING.

TH-THIS IS WHAT A COR-MORANT LOOKS LIKE?

OMF

GRAAAH!

AAAAH?!

SPIT THEM OUT!

HEY! NAGA!

GULP

NGH

HRRK

EEEEEEE

S-SO THIS IS HOW A CORMORANT FISHES.

SIZZZZZZZZZ

SIZZZZ

EEE... EEEEEEE !!

SIZZZZZZZZZZZZ

DARK TIMES LOOK SET TO CONTINUE.

THE YEAR 2105 ...

STRANGE PAVILION / END